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August 26, 1891.

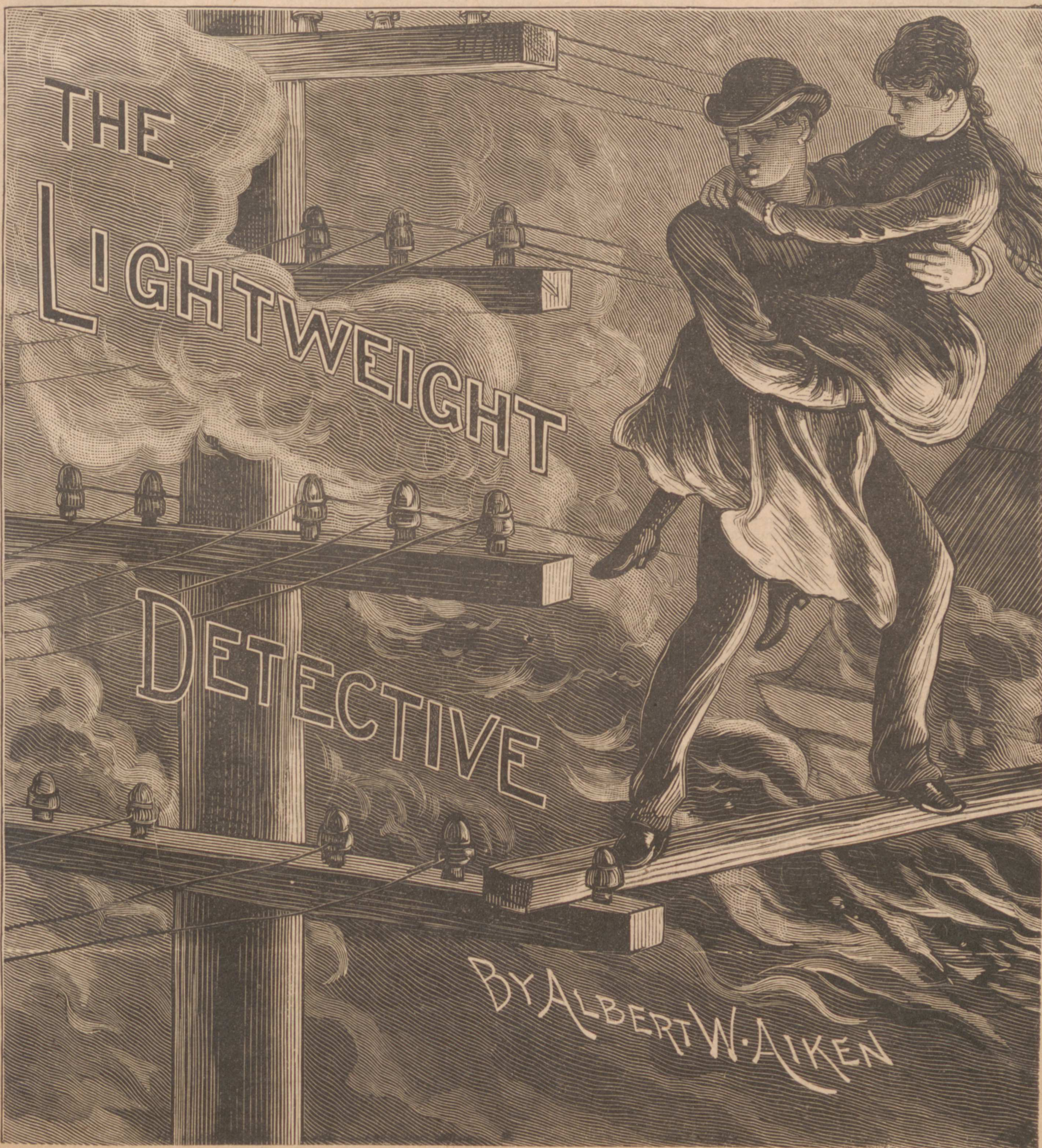
No. 670.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LII.



A GREAT YELL OF APPROBATION CAME FROM THE EXCITED MULTITUDE AS THEY BEHELD THIS DARING DEED.

THE
Lightweight Detective;
 OR,
OLD BLAZES,
THE SOVEREIGN OF THE ROCKS.

A Tale of New York Hovels and Marble
 Halls.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

CHAPTER I.

A DARING DEED.

NIGHT had come. The hour of ten was past, and the hum of the great city was beginning to die away.

The occupants of the human hive were preparing to seek needful slumber after the busy toils of the day.

Then, on the still ear of night, came the clang of bells, which told that the fire-fiend was at his work.

As the bells indicated, the alarm was from an up-town district, where the flames had selected for their prey a shabby, two-story-and-attic wooden house, in one of the side-streets in the region locally known as Turtle Bay.

The first story of this house was occupied by a grocery store, in which the fire had begun. Back of the main apartment was a room where various articles were kept, and in this room a blundering boy had left a lighted coal-oil lamp, and the first thing the storekeeper knew the place was all ablaze.

There were two barrels of coal-oil in the room, and the floor being saturated with the inflammable liquid, the result was that the building was in a fine condition for a conflagration; so, the moment the lamp exploded—this was the supposition—it was like a spark flying into a powder magazine.

Within five minutes after the accident, all the lower part of the house was one mass of flame.

There was some delay in sending out the fire-alarm, for the nearest box was quite a distance away.

The groceryman and his clerk, together with the customers who happened to be in the store when the fire broke out, tried to fight the flames, but were compelled to beat a hasty retreat, and until they got into the street and the crowd began to gather, attracted by the fire, no one thought of giving an alarm, and so valuable time was lost.

The upper stories of the building were vacant, as it happened. The place was sadly out of repair, being one of the oldest houses in the street.

"Is there anybody in the house?" a dozen bystanders anxiously inquired as they watched the flames envelop the whole lower part of the building.

"Nobody up-stairs!" the groceryman and his clerk and the neighbors, who were acquainted with the facts of the case, replied.

And in the opinion of the lookers-on, most fortunate indeed it was that such was the case, for if there had been tenants on the upper floors certain death would have been their fate, since all means of escape were cut off, the flames seizing upon the staircase almost immediately.

They could not have escaped to the adjoining building, for on one side rose the walls of a tenement towering high above the doomed building and on the other side was a vacant lot.

The only chance of escape for any one in the upper floors would be to leap from one of the windows to the street.

"Mighty good thing there isn't anybody in the old rookery," so the crowd kept repeating as they watched the flames mount upward with resistless force.

But all of a sudden there came a cry of horror from the crowd.

The scuttle, on the front-half of the pitch roof, was thrown violently open, and the head and shoulders of a young girl appeared.

Her face was deadly pale, and her red-gold hair, which clustered all over her head in little crispy curls, shone in the lurid light of the devouring flames, like the halo with which the brow of the Virgin Mother is crowned in the pictures of the masters.

No wonder that cry of horror at the unexpected sight.

The girl was gasping for breath, evidently almost choked by the smoke, and so confused that she knew not what to do.

The lookers-on, as if awed into silence by the peril of the girl, seemed stricken dumb.

Not a fireman was in sight, nor was there any sign of their approach.

To perish seemed to be the certain doom of the hapless girl.

Through the street ran a net-work of telegraph wires, and as the sidewalk was a narrow one, not over eight feet wide, it looked possible, if the girl could make her way to the eaves, for

her to spring from the edge of the roof to the telegraph-pole standing exactly opposite the scuttle, and the top cross-bar was nearly on the level of the roof gutter.

A daring, clear-headed man, skilled as a leaper, might make the desperate attempt and succeed in the effort, but not one girl of ten thousand could be expected to accomplish such a feat.

And as the crowd stood, and stared, and shivered with horror, a man darted nimbly through the throng to the foot of the telegraph-pole—a handsome, muscular-looking fellow, with regular features, bright blue eyes and tawny hair, and a smoothly shaven face.

He was dressed in a dark business suit, and, as he reached the foot of the pole he stripped off his coat and vest, and handing them to an elderly, well-dressed gentleman, exclaimed:

"Will you hold my things, while I climb this pole and see if I can do something for this poor girl?"

"Certainly," answered the citizen, all aglow at the thought of such a desperate and difficult attempt.

At the foot of the pole was a motley collection of articles which had been carried from the store at the beginning of the fire.

Among these was a clothes-line reel with a goodly store of line upon it.

This caught the eyes of the young man, and stooping he secured the end of the line, then from the pile of lumber which stood near at hand, deposited there evidently for the purpose of repairing the old house, he selected a scantling about two by four inches and some ten feet long.

"When I reach the cross-pieces of the pole, cut the end of the line and make it fast to this piece of scantling, so I can draw it up," he hurriedly ordered, and then, with the nimbleness of a cat, he threw his arms around the pole and ascended it with such ease that all decided he must be either a telegraph "linesman," or else a sailor used to such things.

"Faith! he's walking up the pole like sailors," cried one of the bystanders.

"Av coorse! Don't yeese be afther seeing that he is a Lightweight?" cried a witty Irishman, near at hand.

This conceit became popular at once, and the name Lightweight went from mouth to mouth in the throng.

The young man gained the top cross-piece, and balancing himself upon it with all a sailor's agility, drew up the piece of scantling.

Then it was an easy matter for him to adjust the scantling so that it formed a bridge, one end resting on the cross-piece of the pole and the other on the edge of the roof.

Luckily for the endangered girl the gutter was a strong one and well secured to the rafters, so it afforded a safe resting-place for the scantling.

This novel bridge completed, the young fellow walked across its narrow surface with the skill and courage of a rope-dancer, and when he reached the roof a great shout went up.

The girl climbed out on the roof and carefully slid down to her rescuer. Then he assisted her to her feet and, seemingly with ease, raised her in his arms and carried her across the frail bridge.

A great yell of approbation came from the excited multitude as they beheld this daring deed.

The girl had been rescued in the nick of time, for, as the dauntless young man, with his fair burden, reached the telegraph-pole, with a great roar, as though angry at the loss of their prey, the flames broke through the roof.

At this moment, as the crowd were beginning to wonder how the girl would get down from her lefty position, the engines came rushing up the street.

One of the first to arrive was the hook and ladder company, and by their aid the two were speedily brought to the ground.

And no sooner were they safely down than a shower of burning brands from the house forced the crowd to retreat in hot haste. In the scurry the girl and the young man were separated, and that was the last the rescuer saw of her.

It was all very strange; there was evidently some mystery about her, for how she came in the deserted house or what she was doing there no one could tell, and after her rescue she disappeared like a ghost.

CHAPTER II.

BOOKINGHAM'S PROPOSAL.

THE elderly citizen who had taken charge of the young man's clothes stuck close to him in the hasty retreat, and when they got at a safe distance away the rescuer put on his apparel.

Then the two entered into conversation as they strolled away.

The police by this time were on the ground in force and began to drive the crowd away from the neighborhood of the burning building.

"That girl can thank you for her life," the old gentleman remarked.

"Yes; if I hadn't happened to be on the spot, I'm afraid she would have been in the other world by this time, for there wasn't a moment

to spare; but what became of her?" the young man replied.

"I don't really know; the fireman brought her down the ladder in his arms when you handed her to him, but the moment she reached the foot of the ladder she said to the fireman, 'Tell the gentleman who saved me that I shall never forget his brave act,' and then glided in among the crowd and disappeared."

"That was rather mysterious; don't you think so?"

"Yes, extremely so, and so it struck me at the moment; but that is not the only mysterious thing. Her being in the house is equally mysterious."

"How so?" the young man asked.

"The upper part of the house was vacant, the store part being the only one occupied."

"You see I am well posted in regard to the facts of the case, as I am the owner of the property."

"Then you should know all about it."

"Yes; my name is Bookingham—Franklyn Bookingham; I am a merchant, still in active business down-town, as I have been for the last forty years, and as I have prospered during that time I own quite a large amount of property up in this neighborhood."

"This old house was once my residence, some thirty odd years ago; there was no store then in the lower part, and this was considered to be out in the country."

"That was before my time," the young man remarked. "I am a New Yorker born and bred, and I can remember that when I was a boy I used to come on fishing excursions to the East river up in this neighborhood, and it was very thinly settled."

"Yes, the house was built by my father, and in it I was born, so you see it is an old-timer."

"It has been out of repair and has not been occupied for the last year, but only a week ago, after consulting with my agent, who attends to all my real-estate matters, I came to the determination to have the place put in perfect order; and that is how the lumber came to be in the street. To-morrow the work was to have begun."

"It was only this afternoon that, in company with my agent, I examined the property, and with my own hands I securely locked the doors when we departed."

"It is very strange indeed," the young man remarked. "How could the girl have gained entrance to the house, and what on earth was she doing there?"

"It is a mystery, and one which must be solved, too. Another strange fact: the face of the girl seems familiar to me, and yet I cannot remember ever having encountered her before."

"The origin of the fire, too, is a mystery," the old gentleman continued.

"I saw Smidt, the groceryman, in the crowd, and exchanged a few words with him. The fire originated in the small store-room at the back of the shop; he supposes that a lighted lamp which his boy carelessly left there exploded, but does not really know surely anything about it, for the flames spread so rapidly that he had no time to look into the matter."

"Well, the affair certainly seems to be a mysterious one," the young man observed, thoughtfully.

"Can it be possible that the girl had anything to do with starting the fire?"

"If she did, it came pretty near costing her her life, for if you had not happened to be on the spot, she certainly would have perished in the flames."

"Some one else might have thought of the same means that I employed," the rescuer replied, carelessly.

"That is true, but it isn't every man who possesses the skill, to say nothing of the nerve, to perform the feat which you accomplished so easily."

"Well, I can thank my early training for that. You see, sir, I have led a life of adventure ever since I was a boy. I was left an orphan at an early age, and was obliged to look out for myself. I went to sea, happened to fall in with a captain who was a gentleman and who took an interest in me. He made a man out of me, and before I was eighteen I was rated on the ship's books as an able-bodied seaman."

"When my patron died I grew tired of a sea life and tried for fortune ashore, and for six years I knocked about in foreign parts, a rolling stone that gathered no moss, but I gained a deal of experience though, and now at last I find myself back in my native city, a wiser if not a richer man than when I last saw it."

"Have you relatives or friends in New York?" Mr. Bookingham inquired.

"I haven't a relative in the world, and though I've a few acquaintances in the city, still I can hardly claim any one of them as a friend."

"How may I call your name?" the other asked.

"Strong—Hugh Strong."

"That is a good, old Anglo-Saxon appellation," Mr. Bookingham observed.

"The crowd, by the way, bestowed a nickname upon you while you engaged in your perilous feat."

"What was it?"

"Lightweight and Firefly, I believe," and the young man laughed.

"That is not the first time that nicknames have been given to me," he remarked.

"A half a dozen times in my life I have chanced to be present at such scenes as this one to-night, and thanks to my sureness of foot and clearness of head I have been able to be of service, and in all these cases my skill in climbing has stood me in good stead."

"Mr. Strong, will you pardon my curiosity if I ask if you have plans in regard to the future? Believe me I do not ask it out of pure curiosity alone."

"You are quite welcome, sir, to the information," the young man responded.

"I will say, frankly, that I have not any definite plans for the future as yet. Although I cannot boast of having acquired a fortune in foreign lands, yet I do not return empty-handed, and so I have ample time to look around me."

"I think I have had enough of roaming for a few years, and shall settle down here in my native city, although to a man of my temperament, used to a life of adventure, I am not certain that I will be able to content myself with a quiet, humdrum life."

"Mr. Strong, I think I can offer you a position that will suit you; it is an odd, perilous one, and only a man like yourself can fill it."

"I am open for an engagement, and whatever the position is I will do my best to fill it."

"A few words will explain. For years I have been troubled by a secret enemy. I have not the remotest idea who it is, or why I am pursued."

"This fire to-night is not an accidental one, as all seemed to imagine; I feel convinced that it is another blow dealt me by my foe."

"Thanks to fortune, which has seemed to favor me at every turn, I have prospered in spite of the attacks, but I am annoyed just the same."

"But through this girl, whose life you saved, I believe a clew can be gained to the villain who has pursued me so bitterly."

"I have employed a dozen detectives, but one and all were baffled, though some of the ablest men in the country have tried their utmost."

"Now then, I have confidence that you can succeed where the others have failed."

"Will you undertake the task? You can draw on me freely for your expenses, and if you succeed you can name your own reward."

"Very well, sir, I will undertake the task," the young man replied.

"I have never done anything in the detective line; but as I have been told a dozen times that I was a natural mimic, I don't see why I shouldn't succeed."

CHAPTER III.

A STORY OF THE PAST.

THE merchant conducted the young man to the locality where his house was situated, an elegant mansion on Fifth avenue, opposite Central Park; but they did not enter it, nor even pass directly by it, but crossed to the other side of the way and entered the park.

Bookingham had explained his reason for so proceeding as they walked along.

"It was not until the last year that I paid any particular attention to this matter," the merchant resumed.

"Although I have been satisfied for a good five years that I had an enemy who was trying to damage me all that he could, yet as his blows, thanks to the good luck which has attended me, have fallen comparatively harmless, I did not trouble my head about the matter."

"The thought could not have been a pleasant one though that such a person existed eager to do you harm at every possible opportunity," the young man suggested.

"Well, to tell you the truth, it seemed to me like the work of a crank," the merchant replied.

"Nearly all the blows were like this one to-night. It looked as if a firebug was after me, but in almost every instance I was so well protected by insurance that the loss did not amount to anything."

"But as the attacks increased, I came to the conclusion to seek the aid of the detectives."

"I did not understand the affair in the least, and had not the slightest suspicion in regard to the identity of the foe who was dealing me these blows in the dark."

"And I believe I understood you to say the men whom you employed were not successful in ferreting out the mystery."

"You are correct; the shrewdest of the private detectives whom I employed were completely baffled," Buckingham answered.

"The trouble was I was not able to give them the slightest clew, nor did any man of them succeed in discovering one."

"But I have been giving the matter considerable thought lately, and I have come to the opinion that both myself and the detectives make a mistake in not being secret enough about the affair."

"Then, too, the detectives were well-known men, and my secret foe undoubtedly spotted

them the moment they came in communication with me."

"The supposition seems reasonable," Hugh observed.

"Yes. Now you are a stranger, and if we are careful not to be seen together, no one will be apt to suspect that you know aught of my affairs, or are in any way concerned in them."

"An excellent idea."

"My home is on Fifth avenue, opposite the park. We will enter the park, and I will point out the house to you."

"My private apartment is on the second story and the windows command a view of the park. Now we can arrange a code of signals so that when you have anything to communicate, either by day or night, you will be able to notify me without being obliged to come to the house."

"Then for the morning hours, when I am down town, it will be easy to arrange a place of meeting, and you can warn me by means of a messenger boy when you wish to see me."

"Oh, yes, that can be easily arranged."

By this time the two had come to Central Park. They passed through the gate, and when the merchant came opposite to his house he pointed it out to his companion.

Being a stately brown-stone mansion, by far the handsomest house in the block, one who had ever seen it would not be apt to forget the fact, or confound the house with any of its neighbors.

"Now, then, as I told you a few moments ago," Buckingham said, as he led the way to a secluded bench amid the shrubbery where they could converse at their ease without danger of being either noticed or overheard, "I have been giving this matter a great deal of thought during the last few weeks, and I have come to the conclusion that I have always made one great mistake about the matter."

"There is an old adage that you must not have any secret from your doctor or your lawyer, for if you do you will be apt to suffer."

"I presume in a case of this kind the same rule ought to hold good with a detective."

"Most certainly; to be able to do good work I should think the detective ought to be put in possession of all the facts bearing on the case," Hugh observed.

"Yes, but the trouble was that I did not think that these matters to which I refer had anything to do with the case at all, but since I have been reflecting upon the subject I have come to the conclusion that it may be possible that my judgment in regard to the matter is faulty, and so I am going to put you in possession of the facts."

"Of course, sir, I have not any idea of the nature of the information that you are about to impart to me, but I can assure you that, no matter what it is, I shall keep it safely locked in my own breast."

"I feel confident that you are a man of discretion and can be trusted," remarked the merchant.

"Upon my word, sir, you will never have cause to regret the confidence you have placed in me," the young man said, earnestly.

"I feel sure of it. I have lived some years in this world and I have always been a close student of human nature, and I flatter myself that I am a pretty good judge of faces, and so far I have made few mistakes."

"But now for my story; every man has a skeleton in his closet, they say, and I am not without that disagreeable article, and in order that you may fully understand the matter I must explain at length."

"I am an only son; my father was a wealthy man, a scion of one of the old New York families, and the money that descended to him from his father he increased tenfold by the success which followed the mercantile house he founded, and to which I succeeded."

"My father had an only brother, as unfortunate as he was successful, but it was entirely owing to the fact that he was reckless and imprudent, given to dissipation, too, and as careless about attending to business as my sire was diligent."

"He died, really cut off in the flower of his youth, a poor man, leaving behind him an only child, a boy of about my own age."

"My cousin's name was Reginald. He was brought up by my father as carefully as though he had been his own child, but the vices of the father extended to the son, although, more shrewd than his sire, he had the wit to conceal his faults, and it was not until he had abused my father's confidence in a hundred ways that the full measure of his sins was discovered."

"Then, reluctantly, my father was obliged to dismiss him from his employ."

"At this time both Reginald and myself were paying attention to the same lady. She favored me from the first, but she was so gentle, so fearful of giving offense, that she did not speak as plainly to Reginald as she ought to have done."

"And the consequence was that when the lady and I were married, my cousin took an insane notion into his head that she had been forced into the union and that she loved him far better than she did me, and that she would gladly have wedded him if she had been allowed."

"So he swore a bitter oath of vengeance against me, and when in his cups—he drank to excess—he made no secret of the hatred he bore me."

"Almost immediately after my marriage my father died leaving me his sole heir."

"This was another blow to Reginald, for he expected to be remembered in my father's will, although how he could have thought such a thing after the manner in which he had behaved was a mystery."

"A year after my marriage a daughter came to bless my home, but when she was just two years old my wife sickened and died."

"This was a terrible blow to me, and so all my love centered in my little girl."

"My villainous cousin knew this. By this time he had gone from bad to worse, and had become a regular scamp—a man who lived by preying upon the weakness of others, and he formed a diabolical plot."

"He watched and waited his opportunity, and at last taking advantage of my absence from town, on a business trip, he stole my little daughter, then a child of three years."

"He took the night steamer up the river for Albany—there was a dreadful accident, the boilers exploded, some fifty of the passengers perished, and among the missing were the abductor and his victim; but, strange to say, the bodies were never discovered."

"I should take that as a sign that they had escaped the danger then."

"Well, I thought so at first, but there were quite a number of the victims so mangled as to defy recognition, and then the bodies of some who were known to be on the boat were never found, so at last I came to the conclusion that the villainous abductor and his innocent victim alike had perished, for no trace of either has ever been discovered from that day to this."

"A sad calamity," Hugh remarked, who had followed the tale with the closest attention.

"Yes, it was a blow from which I did not recover for years, and now lately the question has arisen in my mind:

"Has this secret enemy aught to do with my rascally cousin? Did he really meet death on that occasion or was he fortunate enough to escape the slaughter, and is he now taking tardy vengeance upon me?"

"The theory is worthy of examination," the other remarked.

"I can hardly believe that he escaped, for that is nearly eighteen years ago, and it seems to me that if he was in the land of the living I should have heard something of him. It is possible that these blows come from some one of his worthless associates, some pal who has taken upon himself the task of vengeance."

"I am a Lightweight to do heavy work, but I will undertake the task of discovering the truth and do my best to solve the mystery!" Hugh exclaimed.

And so it was that the Lightweight entered upon the difficult mission.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MCGINNISSES.

OF all the popular streets of the great metropolis the east-side thoroughfare known as Avenue A can claim a prominent place.

From its beginning to its end it is fairly lined with six-storied tenement-houses, many of them boasting a second house in the rear of the first equally as large as the front one.

Many of these houses—human hives—accommodate four families on a floor, twenty-four families in the house; say five in the family—a low estimate—and we have nearly a hundred people in the house. Count the rear house, and we have fully two hundred people herded in a lot of ground twenty-five by a hundred feet, a common country village packed in on a city lot.

Is it a wonder, when an epidemic comes—particularly in the sweltering summer-time—that these unfortunate people, whose only crime is their poverty, should die off like sheep with the rot?

While the lower end of this avenue of which we write is quite a respectable street, despite the fact of its being so densely populated, the upper end is nothing to boast of, for rents are cheap, the neighborhood is not desirable, and in such quarters the squalid poor are to be found.

It is nearly midnight; the evening has been a warm one, and the inhabitants of these narrow dens, for they are little better, after tarrying in the open air until their eyes are heavy with sleep, have gradually retired for the night.

All is not quiet, though, despite the lateness of the hour, for there are brawling husbands and wives, yelling babes, making night hideous with their cries, and drunken boon companions who, after having sworn undying friendship over their liquor, are now preparing to slaughter each other for some fancied affront.

But no one takes any notice of these things—it is an old story.

The husbands and wives will beat each other into quietness. The children will finally cease from sheer exhaustion, and the drunken fellows will be separated by their more sober friends, or some stray policeman will happen

that way to prove to the fighters that clubs are trumps.

So when a young girl ran in terror out of one of the rear tenement-houses, followed by a man whose steps were unsteady, and whose mouth gave utterance to terrible oaths, and a weazen-ed, rat-like boy, with clothes all in tatters, who brought up the rear, no one paid the least attention to the matter.

It was only Patsey McGinnis, just returned from an enforced sojourn on the "Island," as the city prison-house in the East river is popularly termed, bent on celebrating his new-found liberty by making—not Rome—but Avenue A howl.

The girl was known as Sally McGinnis.

She was a niece of Patsey's, an orphan, both father and mother being dead.

Sally was rather a pretty girl with her glossy dark-brown hair and eyes, but her face and form were pinched from her terrible struggle to keep the wolf from the door.

She was a scarfmaker by trade, and by working fully twelve hours a day she could make about four dollars a week.

She was not a fast sewer, being delicate, and the privations of her life were fast sapping her vitality.

Then there were dull times in her trade when only the best of the hands were retained. As she did not rank as A No. 1, she was often without work for a month at a time.

And in order to provide against these terrible months, when no money came in, yet rent must be paid the same as usual and life sustained, she was careful to put by some of her scanty earnings when work was brisk.

The McGinnises, as the neighbors termed them, occupied three small rooms on the top flat, for which the sum of eight dollars per month was paid.

With the uncle and niece lived the weazen-faced lad who was known as Corny Jim, and who sold papers and blacked boots as the humor seized upon him.

The boy was one of those homeless waifs too common, alas, in all our big cities, one of the products seemingly of advanced civilization, for in the rural districts of our land such a creature is unknown.

The manner in which Corny Jim happened to become a member of the McGinnis family was quite romantic.

One night the tenants of the front house and the dwellers in the rear one had become engaged in a regular pitched battle.

That ever-fruited source of trouble, the hydrant in the yard from which the tenants of both houses procured water when the taps in the rooms refused to run, as was often the case in times when the water supply was low, was the center from which the quarrel arose.

Two dames of uncertain age both arrived at the hydrant with their pails at the same moment.

One came from the front house, the other from the rear.

Neither would give way to the other.

From words they came to blows, reinforcements arrived from all quarters, and it required the clubs of the police to separate the contestants.

After the battle was over, and the blue-coats had driven the mob out of the yard, Sally found Corny doubled up in a corner of the yard with a terribly lame leg.

He had been crippled by a brick thrown by one of the fighters, but had been game enough not to betray his condition to the police.

Like all of his class he looked upon the policemen in the light of natural enemies.

As he confided to the girl:

"If I had let on that I was hurted the cops would have lugged me off to the hospital, an' there some sawbones would have p'isoned me, an' arter I was a stiff the guys at the medical college would have had a fine time a-cutting of me up."

The boy was not over twelve years old, but he possessed a wisdom far beyond his years. As it happened at this time, Old McGinnis, as he was commonly termed—although he was not what might be called an aged man, being only about forty-five, and still hale and hearty, though the wear and tear of his sprees were beginning to tell upon him—was up on the "Island," having attempted to paint the upper end of Avenue A red, and only desisting from his purpose when *persuaded* by the club of a vigilant metropolitan.

So the girl assisted Corny to climb the stairs and bestowed him in the shake-down on the floor in the little dark bedroom sacred to the head of the McGinnis family.

The boy soon recovered from his hurt, and then, in the gratitude of his heart, proposed to help the girl along by becoming a boarder.

"I don't eat much, an' I kin steal 'bout all the vegetables you want of Dutch John at the corner, an' mebbe hook a piece of meat from the butcher once in a while when he's got a rush in the store and ain't got his eyes peeled for his stuff on the outside," Corny said, with the most charming innocence as to there being anything wrong about the transaction.

But the girl, who had been carefully brought

up in one of the schools presided over by the Sisters who give their life to good work, was horrified at the idea and read the lad quite a lecture upon the enormity of the offense.

Corny was silenced, if not convinced.

"In course I won't do it if you don't like it," he said. "But all the kids are up to sich games. I kin afford to pay my board if I quit goin' to the a-thers an' a-foolin' my money away pitchin' pennies an' playin' policy."

"I'll reform, I will! I'll turn over a new leaf, so help me Bob! I kin make three or four dollars a week if I have any kind of luck, an' you shall have half of w'ot I git. I reckon that's a square divvy an' no beefsteak!"

When McGinnis returned from the Island he objected, of course, but consented to allow the boy to stay when the girl gave him five dollars which she had managed to save up.

"It's a foine plan," he observed, graciously accepting the money.

"Take all the boarders ye like, divil a hair I care so long as yees do be afther having five dollars for me ivery time I want it."

And he took his departure in triumph, without giving the girl time to reply, so aghast was she at this announcement which seemed to threaten much trouble.

The five-dollar spree which McGinnis immediately began landed him back on the Island before he was a day older.

From that banishment he had just returned, and the moment he made his appearance in the house he had demanded the five dollars.

For three weeks the girl had been out of work, and if it had not been for the money paid by her boarder she surely would have suffered, for work had been so slack that she had not been able to put by much money.

McGinnis's rage at being denied the five dollars was great.

He swore the girl was hiding the money from him and that he would murder her on the spot.

In alarm she had fled down the stairs, the infuriated ruffian had given chase, and Corny had brought up the rear.

There was a bright moon high in the heavens so that all objects in the yard were plainly visible.

The girl fled toward the entrance leading to the street through the front house, but when she gained the middle of the space a well-built man, dressed after a fashion which seemed to indicate he followed the sea for a living, appeared in the doorway.

It was Hugh Strong, the Lightweight, intent upon his mission.

CHAPTER V.

A SLIGHT MISUNDERSTANDING.

"FOR the love of Heaven, let me pass or I shall be murdered!" the girl exclaimed in accents wild.

"No, no, there isn't the least danger of that!" Hugh replied, gazing with interest in the pallid face.

The life of toil and confinement she led had robbed her cheeks of any roses they might have possessed, but that she would have been an extremely pretty girl if fortune had not so oppressed her was clear to the experienced eyes of the Lightweight, who had looked upon the beautiful girls of many a clime during his wild life of adventure in foreign parts.

"Oh, yes, sir, he is perfectly crazy with anger and will surely kill me if I do not run away from him. Oh, please let me pass!" pleaded the girl, tears in her great brown eyes.

"Don't be alarmed, miss. I don't know the man you speak of, but if he is crazy I'm just the best fellow in the world to attend to his case, for in my time I've had lots of experience with mad people."

And at this point McGinnis made his appearance, swearing in the most frightful fashion.

The boy followed close behind, his shrill voice raised in expostulation.

"Don't go fur to make an idyit of yourself, you blame old Paddywhacker!" he yelled. "You'll git the peelers arter you, the furst thing you know, an' then up you go to the Isle of Blackwell!"

When McGinnis reached the center of the yard he came to a halt upon discovering the dark figure of the man standing in the doorway, by whose side the girl crouched.

A moment's inspection satisfied McGinnis that the man was a stranger, for he was not so drunk as not to know all that was going on, but whether the unknown was friend or enemy was a question.

The Irishman halted, and critically examining the stranger, made a low bow.

"The top of the avengin' to yees, sor!" he exclaimed. "Although I hav'n't the pleasure of yer acquaintance I trust yer are afther finding yerself well this avengin'."

"Will yer be afther having the kindness for to give that whitey-face little b'aste a box on the ear and knock her over foreninst me here so I kin be afther b'ating blazes out of her?"

"Don't yer do it—don't yer do it, stranger!" yelled the boy at the top of his lungs. "Don't

you pay any 'tention to this drunken Finnegan, but jest haul off and paste him in the snoot once for luck!"

"Ye brat, I'll br'ake yer back!" cried McGinnis in a rage and he turned to pursue the boy.

This was exactly what Corny wanted.

He knew he could easily outrun the Irishman, drunk or sober; he had tried his legs too often in foot-races with vigilant "cops" not to know what the said legs were capable of doing.

By inducing McGinnis to chase him he afforded Sally an opportunity to escape.

So with a loud and taunting "Yah, yah!" Corny darted into the entryway.

McGinnis followed him as far as the door; but suddenly reflecting that he was affording the girl a chance to elude him, he halted, shook his clinched fist after the boy, and contented himself with calling out:

"I'll be afther catching ye in a corner some day, me foine laddybuck, and thin if I don't lay ye out as stiff as a poker, me name is not Patsey McGinnis."

"Yah, yah! Paddywhack, spell able! Paddywhack, wid de red head!" yelled the lad in defiance from the darkness of the entry.

"I'll pay yees off wan of these days!" retorted the Irishman, as he returned to his former position in the center of the yard.

The girl had taken advantage of this interval to exchange a few words with the stranger.

"Oh, sir, please let me pass!" she again asked. "In the street I can easily make my escape from him."

"Is he your father?" Hugh asked.

"Oh, no, sir, he is my uncle; my father and mother are both dead. But please let me pass, and if you are wise, sir, you will not provoke his anger, for he is a dangerous man when the liquor is in him, and would just as lief do you a mischief as not."

"So I can readily believe," the Lightweight remarked as he listened to the threats the infuriated Irishman hurled after the retreating boy.

"But such brutes as he ought to be tamed once in awhile, and as I've had considerable experience in that line, I shouldn't mind taking a turn with him."

"Oh, sir, be warned, and do not risk it!"

But Hugh never stirred from his position in the doorway.

His blood was up, and he had determined to teach the bellowing brute a lesson if he would not listen to reason.

Hugh Strong's confidence in his ability to more than hold his own with the brawny ruffian was not unwarranted.

Personally he was as fine a specimen of muscular manhood as all the big city could boast.

A sculptor would have been delighted at such a model from which to carve a marble figure of the ancient gladiator who conquered all who came against him in the Roman arena.

Every muscle in his form was like iron, and in his sailor life he had learned to both box and wrestle, and was reputed on board the ships in which he had sailed to be as good a man as ever trod a fo'castle deck.

When McGinnis returned to his position and discovered that the stranger had not moved from the doorway he anticipated trouble, and in the fullness of his joy at the prospect of a battle, in which he promised himself he would beat the stranger black and blue, he swung his long arms around like the sails of a wind-mill and cried out:

"Will you be afther doing phat I axed ye, or will I have to kem afther yees and pull yer ears for to t'ache ye manners?"

"Oh, paste him once, sport, an' make him sick!" the shrill voice of the boy cried from the seclusion of the doorway. "He only fights wid his tongue—he's no good wid his fists!"

"Oh, he will murder you, sir!" the girl cried in alarm, to the stranger.

"Don't you be alarmed; it is more likely that I will murder him if he isn't wise enough to give over this foolishness and go about his business!"

"Oho, ho! murther me, is it?"

And The McGinnis, as he was wont proudly to term himself, executed a war-dance in the center of the yard that would have been laughable but for the circumstance that murder was in the man's heart, and when he got into one of these fits he would no more have hesitated to take life than the average man would hesitate about killing a fly.

"Walk out here wid ye and I've me get a crack at yees! Oho, ho! I'll break yees in two so quick that ye'll never be afther knowing what hit yees."

The Lightweight answered the challenge quicker than the man anticipated, for he advanced so quickly that McGinnis was taken by surprise and had no time to get on the defensive.

The Irishman had played a prominent part in too many affairs of this nature not to understand that the stranger meant mischief.

And as the other strode forward McGinnis got a fair look at his muscular form and noted that he looked like a seaman.

"A sailor, begob! I'm afther striking a tough nut, I'm thinking!" he muttered, as he

stopped prancing around and endeavored to throw himself on guard.

Hugh made a feint at his head; McGinnis threw up his arms to ward off the threatened blow and then—

Whack! a sounding blow, delivered with a force that seemed to the amazed Irishman to resemble the blow that the iron weight of the spile-driver gives when it descends upon the tree more than anything else.

Full upon the brawny chest of McGinnis it fell, and the shock took him off his feet and landed him over against the rear house all in a heap.

The Irishman had been knocked down in his numerous encounters more times than he had fingers and toes, but he had never before received such a blow as this.

Corny Jim was wild with joy as he witnessed the act. He hopped up and down in the entry-way crying:

"All down! A ten-strike! Set up ag'in! The red-headed duffer knocked out in the first round! Bully!"

But McGinnis was not "knocked out," to use the current expression, and was soon on his legs again.

"You murdering blaggard! Ye took me by surprise; ye struck me whin I was off me guard. I'll go bail ye can't do it ag'in! Now, it's my turn!"

CHAPTER VI.

AN EASY CONQUEST.

THE irate man made a rush at his opponent, to bear him down by superior weight; but the Lightweight gave not an inch of ground.

He checked the assault with a straight right-hander which caught his assailant on the chin with a force that made all his teeth rattle; and then, before the big brute could recover, out came the powerful "left" of the supposed sailor, landing full on the chest, and again McGinnis went over backward, all coiled up in a heap.

By this time the windows of both houses were well-filled with spectators, who had been attracted by the noise, and as the bully was generally disliked on account of his offensive ways, his discomfiture was hailed with rejoicing.

"Knock him out!" yelled one.

"Break his back for him, the murdering beast!" cried a second.

"Time! Come up and take your gruel like a man!" howled a third.

Not often the lookers-on were treated to such a scientific display, and they fully appreciated the treat.

As for Corny Jim, he was fairly wild with delight.

"Oho, did ye see that lick?" he yelled.

"Where are ye now, McGinnis?" and he executed a lively jig in the entryway.

The girl crouched against the side of the house, gazing with staring eyes and almost breathless interest upon the contest.

To her mind it did not seem possible for the unknown stranger to contend with her brutal uncle, and with the utmost wonder she saw him go down under the sledge-hammer-like blows of his opponent.

Strange as it may appear there was nothing brutal about this contest.

No blood had been drawn and it seemed more like a friendly contest with the gloves—a spar for points—than a regular fight where each man was striving to damage his opponent all that he possibly could.

But, McGinnis was in a position to assert that this bout, so far, had been no child's play.

Every tooth in his head seemed to be aching from the terrible stroke which he had received on the chin, and his ribs were sore from the two awful blows which had alighted there.

The second stroke, too, had been a little lower down than the first one and had so completely knocked the wind out of him that, when he reached the ground, he was forced to gasp for breath and it was fully three minutes before he could get on his feet again.

McGinnis was game, though, and when he did get on his feet came up to the scratch like a man, although in a sad state of bewilderment.

He was completely astonished at the treatment he had received and did not know what to make of it.

He had been in a hundred battles, more or less, in his time, but on each and every occasion his opponent had been a man about as ignorant of the principles of the fistic art as himself.

Brute force was relied upon, and as McGinnis was an unusually powerful man, as a general thing he had managed to hold his own if not successful in completely vanquishing his antagonist.

A really scientific boxer he had never encountered until he faced this unknown. Like many another man he was not conscious of his own ignorance, but believed that he was a skillful and scientific fighter and so he was completely bewildered by the easy way in which the other handled him.

He ascribed it all to luck, though, and believed that, if he could once succeed in closing in with his antagonist, he would be able to master him.

"Aha, ye blaggard!" he cried as he cautiously approached the other, "I'll be afther poundin' yees in a min'te!"

"You bull-headed idiot, ar'n't you satisfied yet?" the young man asked, sparring for an opening, intending this time to administer a finishing blow.

"Begob! I'll be satisfied whin I break yer back for yer!"

And with the word he delivered a vicious blow at the Lightweight's head, but the young detective ducked and dodged it without the least difficulty, but at the same time landing a one, two, on the ribs of McGinnis, extorting a most decided grunt, for the pain produced by the heavy blows was great.

In his rage he now forgot all caution and made a second wild rush at his antagonist.

Hugh, prepared for just such a movement, merely repeated his previous maneuver.

With a straight "upper cut," the blow, this time, taking McGinnis right between the eyes, stopped and steadied the bully, and then again the terrible right-hander landed on the ribs and McGinnis went over backward, his head striking the hard slabs, with which the yard was paved, with a heavy whack.

This time it was fully five minutes before the man recovered his senses, and when he arose to his feet it was with murder in his heart.

By this time he had become satisfied that he was no match for his antagonist at a fisticuff game, and that the longer he contended the more he would suffer.

The taunting jeers of the lookers-on, who were unsparing in their ridicule of the sorry display he was making in the noble art of self-defense enraged him to madness.

Here was the acknowledged bully of the neighborhood—the man who straightway made it his business to get into a fight with somebody as soon after his frequent visits to the "Island" as possible, getting most beautifully thrashed by a stranger, a smaller man in every way than himself, and the job was apparently being performed with the utmost ease.

Was it a wonder that they laughed at the discomfiture of the tyrant and hurled all sorts of sneering remarks at him from the vantage-ground of the windows?

With considerable difficulty the Irishman gained his feet; his breath came thick and hard, and altogether he was a pretty well used-up man.

He confronted his opponent, blowing and puffing, and it was a minute or two before he could find breath to speak.

"Ye murdering scoundrel! It's yer heart's blood I will be afther having!" he cried, as he drew an ugly-looking knife and made a rush at the Lightweight.

This readiness to use a knife upon the slightest provocation had caused McGinnis to be the dread of the neighborhood. It was known that when his blood was up and the liquor in him, he had just as lief use a knife on a man as look at him, and on this account men who were physically able to cope with the ruffian were reluctant to be drawn into a quarrel with him, for they feared the murderous knife.

"Look out for the knife!" yelled a dozen voices in warning.

Knowing the man as they did, they had expected some such movement, and had been on the watch for it.

But even if he had not been warned, Hugh would have been prepared for such an attack, for his quick eyes caught the glitter of the knife the instant it was drawn, and then, too, the peculiar way in which the man came at him gave immediate warning that McGinnis did not intend to rely upon his fists this time.

But it was not the first time in his life that the Lightweight had seen a knife glitter in the moonlight, and he was in no way alarmed.

He waited with his arms up in boxer fashion, just as if he had not seen the knife, until McGinnis was close to him, and then, as the Irishman made a wicked stroke, the Lightweight suddenly dodged to one side and stuck out his foot so that McGinnis tripped over it and came headlong to the ground, the force of the shock causing the knife to fly from his hand.

Corny Jim, who had ventured from the shelter of the doorway in his anxiety to get a full view of the contest, and was hovering near to the combatants, pounced upon the knife like a vulture.

And Hugh was as quick to spring upon his foe.

Seating himself upon his prostrate form he grasped him by the back of the collar and cried:

"You miserable wretch, if you don't promise never to assault that girl again, I'll hammer the life out of you!"

"L'ave me up—I give in b'ate!" howled the Irishman.

"Will you let her alone?"

"I will—I will!"

"Cheese it, cully! Here come der cops!" warned the boy.

By this time the yard was well filled with spectators.

Hugh sprang to his feet and mingled with the crowd.

Two policemen rushed into the arena and seized McGinnis as he was slowly rising.

"Hold on to him, peelers! He's jist cut a man, and here's der knife!" cried Corny, giving the weapon to the nearest officer.

And so, despite McGinnis's resistance, he was dragged off to the station-house.

CHAPTER VII.

DADDY BLAZES.

UP amid the rocks of Harlem, as the settlement on the upper end of Manhattan Island is locally called, above Central Park is a squatter settlement.

The land is too rough for cultivation, the march of improvement has not yet reached the locality, and quite a large village of shanties has grown up, the occupants of which pay no rent to any one.

It is a pretty tough neighborhood, for the shanty people are a lawless set and apt to make it particularly warm for any decently dressed stranger, imprudent enough to wander into their domain after the shades of evening fall upon the earth.

The shanties are perched among and on the rocks in all sorts of queer positions, are generally only a story high and constructed out of old boards and refuse stuff in the rudest manner.

The police officers stationed in the precinct covering this shanty settlement have a horror of the place and its inhabitants, for it is a well-known fact that a single policeman stands no more chance of taking a prisoner out of the settlement unless the inhabitants are willing, and they seldom are, than a fly has of overcoming a spider in single combat after he has been ensnared in the web of the destroyer.

When a criminal takes refuge amid the shanties on the rocks and the metropolitans go to "lay him by the heels," never less than a dozen well-armed men essay the task, and when they storm the rocks it is with drawn revolvers, just as if they were out on the plains amid a host of savage Indians.

And if the criminal is an important one—a man in whom the shanty people take a great interest—it will be all that the dozen well-armed policemen can do to secure their prisoner.

Even the women and children turn out *en masse*, and cobble-stones and pieces of rock, from the size of a man's fist to his head, are ugly missiles to guard against when handled from a height.

The only way in which the policemen can secure an important man who takes refuge amid the rocks—one for whom the inhabitants will be apt to fight—is to go with such a force that the shanty people will see that resistance is useless.

Many queer characters dwell in this plague-spot nestling in the very heart of the big city; and one of the queerest of them all was an odd, eccentric old man, known as Daddy Blazes.

Daddy Blazes was one of the fathers of the "settlement." His shanty, which was perched upon the summit of a hugerock—the highest point in the neighborhood—was one of the first erected in the locality, rumor said some twenty or twenty-five years ago.

The original squatter settlement was at Forty-second street, but the march of improvement put an end to this "village," and forced the squatters to go up-town.

Daddy Blazes was as odd in his person as he was peculiar in character.

He was a man well in years, sixty-five or seventy, or possibly older still; his once tall figure was now bent over almost double, and his stoop gave him the appearance of a hunchback.

His face was distorted, and a huge scarlet scar disfigured all of the right side, running from the eye to the jaw.

The wound which had left such a terrible mark must have been a dreadful one.

His hair fell in long tangled masses clear down to his shoulders, and his beard was fully a foot long.

The natural color of both hair and beard was iron gray, but some strange vanity made this eccentric old man dye them black, and as the dye did not work as effectively as it should have done, both hair and beard were streaked, presenting a most strange, unnatural appearance.

His eyes were sunk under overhanging brows, and sparkled like a pair of jet beads.

His long, bony fingers were more like the talons of a bird of prey than human hands, and, take him for all in all, he had a most repulsive appearance.

He was habited in a wretched old suit, which seemed much more fit for the rag-bag than for protection to the human form.

By occupation the old man was a fortune-teller.

"The seventh son of a seventh son," so he professed, and the dingy tin sign attached to the door of his shanty bore this announcement underneath his name, which was here given as Dr. Blazes.

But this abbreviation was never understood to mean doctor by any one who knew the old man, for Daddy Blazes he was always called.

But if you had interviewed the police captain

of the district in regard to the squatter veteran, he would have told you:

"Oh, the fortune-telling is all bosh! He's no more a fortune-teller than I am. That is all a cloak to cover up his real business."

"He may rope some greenhorns in once in a while who don't know any better, but we do."

"And what is his real business?" would be the natural question.

"A 'fence'—a receiver of stolen goods, the boss who plans the robbery and decides how the job can best be worked."

And this was the reputation that Daddy Blazes bore among the police.

He was reputed to be very wealthy, and it was said that no expert cracksmen need lack for the bones and sinews of war—the hard cash—if he knew of a good chance for plunder.

The old man was no common "fence;" he did not deal in any bulky articles, only in small valuable goods.

And the police had a superstitious belief that the rock, whereon the shanty of Daddy Blazes was built, was hollowed out in secret underground passages where the stolen articles were concealed until a good opportunity offered for their disposal.

Interview the captain of the precinct again and he will tell you:

"A half a dozen times, at least, after some big robbery, where the operators have made a great haul, have we tracked the men, whom we were morally certain did the trick, direct to Daddy Blazes's shanty—have been so close on their heels that they had no chance to get rid of their plunder, and yet, when we got out a search-warrant, and raided the premises, not a trace of the plunder could we find; yet three or four months afterward through our secret channels of information that we must always have, we would get word that Daddy Blazes had succeeded in disposing of the property."

There was no receiver of stolen goods in the city whom the authorities were so anxious to get "dead to rights" as this "King of Shantytown," and yet, so careful was he about the way he carried on his business that the police, with all their watchfulness, could never succeed in entrapping him although they had tried all sorts of shrewd tricks.

It is night when we introduce the reader to the squatter settlement and its inhabitants, and the time some forty-eight hours later than the hour when the old house in the Turtle Bay district was destroyed by fire.

One reason why the police had such ill luck in getting the best of Daddy Blazes was the fact that they were never able to surprise him.

The shanty was always guarded, night or day, by three large, savage dogs, and it was impossible for any one to approach the dwelling at any time without rousing the watchful brutes who immediately gave the alarm, and thus afforded time for Daddy Blazes to prepare for visitors.

On this night of which we write the old man sat alone in his shanty. A small coal-oil lamp was burning upon the table, and by it sat the old man in a dilapidated rocking-chair.

He was evidently in a brown study, for he was leaning back in the chair, with his eyes fixed upon vacancy.

"What is the matter?" he murmured. "Why does he not come?"

"He succeeded in performing the task all right, and according to the reports, no one has the slightest suspicion of how the job was done."

"Aha!" and the old man chuckled to himself for a moment.

"This is the way I like it. I like to sit in the dark like a huge spider, and deal these blows which make my enemies wonder and tremble—wonder at the force of the stroke and the suddenness with which it descends and tremble at the damage inflicted by the blow."

At this point the dogs without began to indicate their presence and vigilance. Instantly the old man was alert, springing forward, half-rising from his chair, in a listening attitude.

"Good dogs!" he muttered. "Old Blazes is safe with such guards at the door!"

It was his boast that his savage dogs possessed about as much intelligence as the average human, and by their method of barking when any one approached he could tell the character of the visitor, for the dogs were never deceived.

No matter how cleverly a man might disguise himself, he never deceived the sagacious animals.

They could smell out a police spy as far as they could see him, and as for the police themselves they fairly went crazy at the sight of a blue-coat.

And the animals, too, seemed to be able to distinguish a "crook" as well, no matter whether he wore the rags of a tramp or the broadcloth of a gentleman.

Five different ways the dogs had of warning their master that some one was coming.

A prolonged howl for a police spy or detective in disguise, a violent series of barks for a metropolitan in full uniform, a succession of short, sharp sounds when they believed the newcomer to be all right, some one who boded no danger to their master, a single yelp for a "crook," but when their instinct was at fault and they were in doubt as to the character of

the stranger, they would race up and down before the house, scratch at the door and whine piteously.

It was not often that this happened though, for the dogs seldom hesitated in regard to a visitor.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CRACKSMAN KING.

DADDY BLAZES listened for a moment.

The three dogs each gave a single yelp, one after the other.

The first dog who had discovered that some one was approaching had expressed his opinion in regard to the new-comer; then the others in turn had responded, so the warning must arrest their master's attention.

"It's my man this time, I guess; but where on earth has he kept himself for so long?" the King of the Rocks muttered, as he arose from his seat, went to the door, opened it and peered forth into the night.

A small yard, about twenty feet square, was in front of the shanty, extending around the house on three sides. Within this inclosure the dogs roamed, and he must be a daring man indeed who attempted to enter the yard when the brutes were aroused.

The shanty was well guarded against a surprise, for the yard and the dogs protected it on three sides, while on the fourth the huge rock upon which the house was built reared abruptly to the height of ten or twelve feet; hence for any one to get at the shanty from that direction it would be necessary to use a ladder. Any attempt to get into the house by this means of course would have been frustrated by the vigilant dogs.

The moment Daddy Blazes opened the door the dogs again gave utterance to their short, peculiar yelps, their method of informing their master that, in their opinion, the new-comer was all right.

The moon was just coming up, affording light enough to enable the old man to distinguish who it was that waited by the gate—waited for the King to call off the sentinels, who still stood on guard.

"Is that you, Bud?" asked Daddy Blazes, peering forth through the half-opened door.

"Yes, but don't be so free with my name, if you please," replied the other.

"Why not?" growled the old man.

"Because there's somebody after me, I'm afraid; tell the dogs to let me in as soon as possible," replied the man, hurriedly; "the quicker I get to cover the better."

"Down there, you brutes!" commanded the old man, in a low voice, at which the well-trained animals laid down and the new-comer hastened into the house.

"Look sharp there, my beauties! Seek 'em!" exclaimed Daddy Blazes, and with the word the dogs were once more keenly on the alert, prowling up and down, snuffing the air suspiciously, as if they scented danger from every quarter.

The two entering, the old man closed the door and fastened it.

The castle was well-guarded!

There was a large, old-fashioned lock in the middle of the door, and heavy bolts at both top and bottom, while the portal itself was none of your modern sham that a single, well-directed kick would shatter into splinters, but an old-fashioned fellow almost stout enough to bid defiance to an ax.

"Now you are safe," the old man announced; "but, in heaven's name, what has kept you so long—where have you been all this time?"

The new-comer was a tall, well-built man, with jet-black hair and eyes, and a complexion almost as swarthy as that of an Italian.

He seated himself by the table and was looking around him in a sulky sort-of-way, just as if he did not relish being questioned.

"Give me a drink of whisky, Daddy!" he curtly demanded.

"I guess you have had too much whisky already and that is what has been the matter," the old man grumbled, as he rose from his seat and produced a bottle and glass from a corner cupboard.

"If you don't take my advice and let whisky alone it will get you hanged one of these days."

"Bah! Have done with your preaching," responded the other, contemptuously, as he filled the glass half full of the potent fluid and swallowed it as so much water.

"A short life and a merry one, is my motto," he continued. "Do you s'pose I want to live to be as old as you are? To go 'round all doubled up like a hunchback? Oh, no! That wouldn't suit my book, at all. I would rather pass in my checks."

"Oh, you needn't worry; you'll never live to be as old as I am," snarled Daddy Blazes, evidently annoyed by the remark of the other.

"The policeman with a bullet, or the hangman with his rope will snap your thread of life before you are a dozen years older unless you are a far luckier man than I take you to be."

"Bosh!" exclaimed the other, as he helped himself to another draught of the whisky. "Maybe you think you can worry me with such talk, but you cannot. I don't value my

life; when my time comes I am ready to go, and all your croaking will not hurry the matter any."

"You did the job, I see, all right?"

"Oh, yes; I don't generally make a mess of anything that I undertake if I have half a chance for my life."

"But, why didn't you return here immediately?"

"Now, Daddy, you are getting curious, and curiosity is a vice sometimes," laughed the other, displaying his strong white teeth which strangely reminded one of an animal.

"Oh, it is all right if you choose to run into danger, but if you get into the stone-jug through your own imprudence don't send for me to help you out," retorted Old Blazes, angrily.

"Oh, yes, I will," replied the other, insolently.

"You would be the first man I should apply to, Daddy, and you would help me out, too, and don't you forget it."

There was a covert threat in the speech, and the old man was quick to resent it.

"It is the whisky that is talking now. You wouldn't speak that way if the liquor hadn't muddled your brain," he retorted.

"You and I have only done business together for a little while," he continued, "and I do not think that you really understand what kind of a man I am."

"To the pal who obeys my orders and who does what is right, I stick, until the last gasp."

"If he is in the grasp of the law, I will spend money as though it could be had as freely as water to help him out. The best criminal lawyers in the city will be employed to defend him, and if he is in so bad a hole that legal tricks will not help him, then money will be used to blind the eyes of the men who have him in charge, so that he will be able to escape."

"And if all efforts fail, if lawyers' wits cannot help him and the guards cannot be bribed, then the jury will be got at. A fortune will be spent to buy one or two men on the jury so that a disagreement will result."

"In fine, all that money can do will be done to save my boys, provided they do as I tell them, but if they attempt to kick over the traces, and wish to run matters in their own way, then if they get into difficulties they must look out for themselves, for I wash my hands of the whole affair."

The new-comer looked at the old King searchingly, for a moment, as much as to ask if he meant what he said, but Daddy Blazes faced him undauntedly, and though the other was as reckless a scoundrel as ever lived, yet, as he gazed into the gleaming eyes of the old sinner he realized that Daddy Blazes was a foeman worthy of his steel.

"Well, Daddy, if I get into quod, and you don't come to my assistance, hang me if I don't put a knife into you when I get out."

"If you get the chance!" added the old man with a fiendish chuckle. "Always put in, my dear young pal, 'if you get the chance,' because, no chance no knife business, you know. So, no chin—no bravado about this matter; look at it in a reasonable light. Do you think in a game of this kind that two can't play at it?"

"I don't want to boast—what is the use of it? but I will say that no pal ever betrayed me yet that he did not regret it, unless he fled to a foreign land to escape my vengeance, and even then my arms are long enough sometimes to reach him."

And as he spoke the old wretch stretched out his bony arms and worked his talon-like fingers convulsively, as though he was eager to grip the throat of a foe.

"No, no, don't fool yourself," he added. "You can't afford to quarrel with me."

"Well, maybe I can't; but I don't like to be kept in leading strings, I'm no child," the other responded, sulkily.

"You have acted like one in this matter, I should judge," Blazes responded; "but what have you been up to, anyway?"

"After doing the job I thought I would like to take a bowl with the boys down-town, so I went on a bit of a tour."

"And the first thing you knew you found a police spy on your track."

"Exactly; why, Daddy, you are a fortune-teller for sure," laughed the desperado.

"It doesn't require much skill to predict a thing of this kind. A man as well known as yourself should not venture when you know the officers are after you."

"I dodged the fellow, and thought I had thrown him off my track, but I'm afraid it was a failure, for I fancied I was shadowed right to your door."

A prolonged howl from one of the dogs rose on the air; then the others joined in.

"Police spies are approaching!" Daddy Blazes cried.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE SCENT.

THE crook sprung to his feet and grasped his revolver.

The dogs continued to howl without, having all rushed down to the fence to receive the strangers.

"Put up your weapon!" ordered Blazes, as he listened to the dogs' signal.

"There is more than one—the brutes tell me that—possibly a half a dozen, and there is no use of attempting to fight your way through them.

"The cops have learned wisdom and they know well enough that for one or two men to attempt to take a prisoner out of this settlement is mere folly.

"The last time that game was tried there were three of them, all with their revolvers cocked in their hands—three as good officers, too, as the precinct can boast; but, in spite of their weapons, all three of the men were laid out and their prisoners escaped.

"No, no; no use for you to attempt to fight your way through them; we can baffle the blood-hounds in an easier way."

The shanty was a large one, covering a space of about fifteen by thirty feet, and was divided into two apartments by a partition through the center.

At the east end of the outer apartment was a huge chimney, built of stones put together with a sort of mud mortar, something like the chimney so common in the log cabin region of the South and Southwest.

In the center of this chimney was a small fire-place wherein the squatter had constructed a rude sort of grate, a home-made affair, fixed up out of old iron hoops.

To the chimney Daddy Blazes hastened. He fumbled around the side of it nearest to the door for a moment; then a section of the apparently solid wall swung out under the touch of his hand, revealing a recess about a yard deep by two feet wide and nearly five feet high, affording ample room for a man to conceal himself and containing a stool as its only furniture.

The other gazed at this secret hiding-place in astonishment; for no one looking at the chimney could possibly have guessed that it was otherwise than what it seemed.

"In with you!" commanded the old man. "Here's a hiding-place that will defy all the sleuth-hounds of the police, even if they had noses as keen as those of my trusty dogs without."

"This is the biggest thing in this line I ever struck," the cracksman remarked, as he entered the hole, and seated himself upon the stool.

"Say, Daddy, there ain't any chance of a fellow smothering after being shut up in this place, is there?" asked the fugitive, as he cast an apprehensive glance around.

"Oh, no, no danger of that," answered the King, as he began to shut the door.

"There are pipes leading through the top wall to the outer air, so that there is no danger of suffocation."

"Well, that's good!"

"But there is another danger."

"What is it?" asked the cracksman, slightly nervous.

"This thing fastens with a lock that can only be opened from the outside. Now, if I should die, or want to be revenged upon you from any cause, no one else could open it and you would perish in the most miserable manner," and with a diabolical chuckle the Sovereign of the Shanties closed the door, which fastened with a sharp snap, leaving the imprisoned cracksman to reflections which were not altogether pleasant.

Of course the old man was joking when he suggested the possibility of his shutting his guest up in the secret cell to die, but it wasn't pleasant to even joke upon such a ticklish subject.

Having thus safely concealed his guest, Daddy Blazes turned his attention to what was going on without.

The dogs, racing along the inside of the fence, were kicking up a furious row.

The old squatter opened the door, and by the aid of the moonlight he was able to discern half a dozen men, dressed in dark clothes, but all with revolvers in their hands, advancing toward the house.

Daddy Blazes was tolerably well acquainted with all the police and detective force, and had little difficulty in recognizing five of the best detectives in the city, led by the sixth man, who was no other than Inspector Burke in person.

The Inspector greeted the old man the moment he opened the door.

"Hallo, Daddy!" he exclaimed; "call off your dogs if you don't want the brutes killed."

"Ah, is that you, Inspector?" Blazes answered, with studied politeness. "I am delighted to see you. What brings you up my way, this evening?"

"Call off your dogs and you will soon see," replied the policeman, curtly.

"Certainly, certainly, Inspector! Don't hurt the poor brutes: they are the only protectors I have. A poor old man like me, living here all alone would have a hard time of it, if it wasn't for the dogs to keep the tramps away."

"Oh, yes, no doubt," the Inspector rejoined, ironically.

"They are good dogs and I wouldn't have them hurt for the world."

And then the King called to the dogs, who reluctantly came skulking up to the house and entered the barrels which served for kennels.

The detectives came trooping in through the gate, each and every man on the alert with his revolver ready for action.

"Be careful that your pistols don't go off, gentlemen," Daddy Blazes said with assumed alarm. "I am mortally afraid of fire-arms; so many accidents are occurring all the time, and you need not be alarmed about the dogs, I assure you; when I tell them to be quiet, they are as harmless as so many lambs."

"Oh, we are not concerned about your dogs, Daddy, it's a human that we are on the lookout for."

The old denizen of the rocks pretended to be greatly surprised and a little alarmed.

"I hope you don't mean me, Inspector?" and he feigned considerable apprehension. "I am quite sure I haven't done anything to merit a call from you."

"No, Daddy, we don't want you, but we want to search your house."

"Oh, Inspector, what on earth do you want to do that for?" Blazes cried. "What do you expect to find there?"

"You know well enough," replied the Inspector, sternly, "and we want no nonsense about this matter."

"We have tracked our bird so closely that we are certain he is concealed in your shanty, and we have come with a force sufficient to take him, even if you raise the whole settlement on us, but I want to give you fair warning that if you value your own life and the lives of your pals here you had better take this matter quietly, for if you attempt to raise a row we are going for you, red-hot!"

"Oh, Inspector, what do you take me for?" exclaimed Daddy in a reproachful tone. "Arn't you acquainted with me well enough to know that I wouldn't go in to do anything ugly, for the world?"

"Of course not! Your gang up here didn't lay out three officers so that they had to be sent to the hospital, only about a month ago," the officer remarked, with some asperity.

"Upon my honor, Inspector, I knew nothing about the affair until it was all over!" the old scamp protested.

"I understand all about that," was the Inspector's answer. "You are the man who stands in the background and eggs the other fellows on. You are the boss of this settlement, and responsible for all these attacks on officers. All you had to do was to crook your finger, and no one of your gang would have dared to move a hand against the policemen."

"Oh, there's a rough set up here," demurred the Sovereign, "and I hav'n't the least influence over them."

"Tell that to some one who doesn't know you; I can't take it in," retorted the officer. "But to come to business: you have a man concealed in your house, and we want him. Advise him to come out, and so save trouble. You see, I have a squad here big enough to take him in spite of all your gang. We mean business from the word go, and you will save trouble by advising him to come out and surrender peaceably."

"You have been misinformed, Inspector; there's no man in my house."

"Don't lie about it! Black John Buddock was tracked right to your door. He was seen to enter the house, and as there were two men on the track, one remained on the watch while the other went for reinforcements, so we know that the man is still in your shanty, for he didn't come out."

Daddy Blazes shook his head.

"I don't know the man of whom you speak. I never even heard of him, but I will say that, if you find any man in my house, no matter who he is, I will agree to eat him."

"Oh, Daddy, we have got you dead to rights this time and no mistake!" the Inspector observed, triumphantly.

"I suppose there is some back way through which my gentleman means to skip, and that is the reason why you have kept us chinning here; but, old man, that leetle game will not work, cunning as it is, for we have got a squad of men at the rear of your shanty, and if he tries to escape in that direction we'll nab him sure, or plug him dead."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the old man, much to the astonishment of the officer, who expected to see him almost stupefied with amazement at this intelligence.

"Well, now wouldn't that be the richest kind of a joke on him! How disgusted he would be; but, as he ain't here, the thing can't be did."

The Inspector was puzzled. He had been sure of his prey this time, for the men who had tracked the fugitive so closely were two of the best on the force—both, too, well acquainted with the cracksman, who was as distinguished in his line as any man in the country.

It could not be possible that they had made any mistake in the matter.

No, no; Daddy Blazes was simply playing a big game of bluff.

CHAPTER X.

BAFFLED.

THE man whom they sought they believed was concealed in the shanty ready to make a dash through their line at the first favorable opportunity.

"Well, Daddy, we will go through your house. If the man isn't here no harm will be done," the Inspector said.

"Certainly not; but, I reckon you ought not to search my house without due process of law," the old man protested.

"We have a warrant for the arrest of our man, and as we know he is concealed in your shanty I think our authority is sufficient. Anyhow we will risk it."

"Forward, men!" the Inspector commanded, "and if the fellow tries to break through our line shoot him without mercy."

The detectives advanced, Daddy Blazes bringing up the rear.

They entered the house and searched it in the most thorough manner, but, of course, found not the slightest trace of the man whom they sought.

All of them looked anxiously for secret hiding-places, mindful of the rumors which declared that there were secret underground passages leading from the King's Castle.

The floor was sounded, and nearly every board tested to see if there were any trap-doors or vault entrances anywhere around.

But, none were found, and after a good half-hour's search, the detectives in disgust gave up the job, and retreated.

Daddy Blazes accompanied them to the door, and bestowed upon them a parting shot.

"You see, Inspector, I was giving it to you as straight as a string, but you detective coves are mighty thick-headed, sometimes."

"I'll catch you tripping some of these days, and then look out!" retorted the Inspector, as he retired, and soon disappeared around the rocks.

"When you do, just have the kindness to let me know!" cried Daddy Blazes, in defiance.

The old man chirruped to the dogs to be on the lookout; then reentered the house, and securely refastening the door he proceeded to release the cracksman from his chimney cell.

"We fooled 'em nicely," chuckled the old man; and then, when John Buddock (or Black Buddock, as he was generally termed, on account of his swarthy complexion) stood in the room, the Shanty Sovereign shut the secret door. When it was closed, although the cracksman examined it in the most careful manner he was not able to discover the slightest trace of the opening, and expressing his wonder at this, the old chief of thieves chuckled:

"Do you s'pose the thing was fixed so that every fool who comes along could find it?"

"No; but though I know it's there, I'll be hanged if I can find it, and I want you to understand that I am no slouch where locks are concerned. I reckon my reputation as a cracksman is as good as any high-toby gentleman you can pick up in the country."

"Oh, I know that," the other assented.

"I've cracked a heap of cribs in my time, and some of them have been pretty difficult pieces of work, too, but this job gets me."

"It was done by one of the best workmen in both stone and iron that ever touched a tool in this or any other country," Daddy Blazes assured.

"Poor fellow! he was a genius; but through an ill turn of luck he was nabbed while right at work and sent to Sing Sing."

"I spent a couple of thousand dollars to get him out; had everything arranged for his escape, and all worked well; he got safely out of the prison and took to the water."

"He could swim like a duck, and we had a boat waiting for him off the dock."

"I even had the thing arranged so nicely that the rifles of the guards had been tampered with—all the ball cartridges withdrawn and blank cartridges substituted, so that when the sentinels discovered him in the water and discharged their pieces, they should do him no damage."

"Mighty well planned!" exclaimed the other, in admiration.

"Yes, that is generally the way I do business, but the best-laid plans don't work, sometimes."

"The man who did the cartridge act (and it cost a cool two hundred dollars to buy the fellow, too) had to work the trick in a great hurry, and, under the circumstances, it was excusable for him to blunder."

"By some mischance he mixed one of the ball cartridges with the blank ones in the hurry of the change, and as the gun loaded with the ball happened to fall into the hands of a dead shot, my noble Roman was shot dead in the water."

"His time had come, and that was all there was to it," Buddock observed, philosophically.

"Yes; the fellow who made the blunder was sorry for it, and told me that, in order to square the thing, the next time I wanted the trick worked he would do it for a hundred."

"That was doing the fair thing," and as the cracksman spoke he resumed his seat at the table.

"Now, then, I suppose for the present I am safe," he continued; "there isn't much likelihood of their making a second visit here, in search of me."

"No but, though for the time he is baffled, the Inspector is not a man likely to give up the search."

"You see, two of the men traced you to the house; they saw you enter it; and as they were evidently well acquainted with you, there isn't any doubt in their minds that you were nicely treed."

"Yes, I know both of the bloodhounds almost as well as I know you. Both of them, in years gone by, have had the pleasure of clasp- ing the darbies on my wrists, and one of them, in the fight that took place when they captured me, got a clip over the head from the butt of my revolver that will mark him as long as he lives."

"They took me by surprise, and jumped on me so quick that I had no time to cock the weapon or else there would have been a couple of detectives less in the world."

"The whole thing turns on what opinion the Inspector forms in regard to the affair," Daddy Blazes observed.

"If Burke is not satisfied with his search, and believes you to be concealed in the house, why, he will put a watch upon it, and it will not be safe for you to venture forth until the watch is removed; but if, on the other hand, he believes that you contrived to elude the vigilance of the detectives, and either did not enter the house or else managed to get out of it without the knowledge of the man placed upon guard, while his companion went for reinforcements, then of course he will not pay any more attention to this quarter and you will be at liberty to get away. If you will take my advice you will assume some disguise and get out of New York until this breeze blows over."

"A good idea," the other assented.

"Yes, things are pretty hot, now. In a month or so something new will turn up to occupy the attention of the detectives, and you will be pushed out of sight."

"In the morning it will not take me long to find out whether there is any detective nosing around the neighborhood or not, no matter how skillfully he may be disguised."

"Your advice is good and I will adopt it; but, what the deuce am I to do to pass the time away?" the cracksman observed with a yawn.

"Thanks to the liberal manner in which you paid me for the job I did for you I have a well-filled pocket-book and it seems a shame to be imprisoned here when, with the ducats I might be painting the town red."

Daddy Blazes grinned.

"I have no objection to a quiet game of poker myself, sometimes," he observed.

"Oho! I see your game!" cried Buddock. "Having paid me the money you want me to gamble with you so that you will have a chance to win it back again; but I'm your man for all that!"

The cards and the bottle of whisky were produced, and the two sat down to play.

They were pretty evenly matched as far as skill went, and as fortune divided her favors between them without especially favoring either party the game enriched neither.

They played until long after midnight, and were just on the point of giving it up when the dogs began to stir outside.

They ran down to the fence and whined; then ran up to the door and scratched; then back again and whined at the fence.

"Some one is coming and the dogs are puzzled to decide whether it is friend or enemy," Daddy Blazes explained.

CHAPTER XI.

OFF THE TRACK.

WHEN the police made their appearance in the yard, prepared to arrest the combatants, and so put an end to the disturbance which had been reported to them as verging upon a riot, the sight of the hated blue-coats seemed to put new life into the discomfited Irishman.

Here were his ancient foes, and he immediately defied them to mortal combat, and the result was, as we have before stated—clubs soon proved to be trumps, and McGinnis was lugged off by the policemen, who were forced to almost carry him, and almost all the people in the yard followed.

Warned by the cry that the "cops" were coming, Hugh Strong disappeared in the crowd, and so escaped arrest.

He made his way to where the boy and girl were standing, and Corny, quick to appreciate the situation, volunteered to pilot the stranger to a safe harbor while McGinnis was struggling with the police.

Eel-like, the boy wriggled through the crowd, the members of which had pressed forward eagerly to witness the fight between McGinnis and the policemen, some of them evincing a disposition to lend the vagabond a helping hand, for the average inhabitant of the tenement house of the great city is, as a rule, far more apt to look upon the policeman as a foe than a friend.

The officers were sturdy, resolute fellows though, used to handling just such men as McGinnis, and the prompt and effective way in which they used their clubs upon their prisoner, who acted like a crazy man the moment he caught sight of the officers, tended to cool the ardor of the crowd, so the crowd contented itself with wrathful cries and oaths, and permitted McGinnis to be dragged away.

This behavior on the part of the bystanders allowed the Lightweight to escape without attracting observation.

The boy led the way to the entry of the rear house.

Experience had taught him that the chances were that the policemen would "lay out" the Irishman, and then that they would convey their prisoner through the front entry into the street, and the crowd would follow, leaving the yard deserted.

For even those of the crowd who had no idea of going to the station-house flocked to the street to see the captive dragged off.

In the darkness of the entry they would be safe from observation.

The boy's calculations were correct.

He succeeded in safely piloting Sally and the stranger to the entry and gaining its shelter.

Corny advised that they proceed to the extreme end of it, where the cellar stairs descended under the main ones.

"You see, it's a dark corner back there," he remarked, "and the folks wot come in will h'ist right up-stairs to their rooms and nobody won't go back there."

The advice was good and Hugh admitted its wisdom.

The end of the entry was as dark as a pocket, and there wasn't any likelihood of anybody discovering that there was a soul there unless they took the trouble to come clear to the end of the entry.

"Nobody will come here unless they want to go down-cellar, and you kin bet yer boots that there ain't nary folks got any call for to go down-cellar at this 'ere time of night," the boy observed, shrewdly.

"Oh, there isn't any danger of anybody discovering us here unless they come purposely to seek us out," Hugh observed.

"I don't think anybody tumbled to our leetle game," Corny remarked with an air of profound wisdom.

"They are too busy a-looking at the cops and McGinnis. Hear the Irishman howl!" he added.

McGinnis was yelling at the top of his lungs as he resisted the efforts of the policemen to drag him from the yard.

"Oh, I hope they will not kill him," the girl observed with a shudder as she listened to the wild cries.

"Don't you be afeard of that; the old man has got a head as hard as a paving-stone, and then he's used for to git hammered," the boy replied, confidently.

"If he didn't git into a fight with the peelers, and git knocked out at least once a month he wouldn't know wot to make of it."

"It's like bread and meat to him; it's wot the cuss lives on."

"Very unsubstantial diet I should think," Hugh remarked.

"It's fun for him; that is the way he enjoys himself," Corny explained.

"Bless yer, he does it reg'lar. Why, we don't see the light of his precious countenance here, more than one quarter of the time."

"When he ain't up to the Island a-doing time he's in some stone jug waiting his trial, and it's allers for 'salting and battering some cop."

"I should think that he and the members of the police force must be pretty well acquainted by this time," Hugh remarked.

"Oh, they all know him, you can bet all the ducats you've got on that!" the boy asserted.

"They don't fool with him much now, I tell you, but they jest go in for to knock him out at the first lick!"

By this time the warlike Irishman had been partially subdued, and the police having got him out of the yard his yells became fainter and fainter as the procession moved toward the station-house.

"What possessed the brute to attack you?" the Lightweight inquired of the girl.

"Oh, I can spin that yarn to you, right off the reel!" Corny exclaimed before the girl could get a chance to reply.

"The miserable fraud is her uncle, you know."

And then he told the story of the girl's life.

The young man listened to the tale with indignation.

"Why, this fearful old wretch may strike you a blow which will disable you for life one of these days!" he exclaimed.

"That's so! that is wot I've often told you, ain't I, Sally?" said Corny.

"I tell you wot it is, boss; if she'd take my advice, she would cut and run some time when this beast of an Irishman is taking his constitutional up at the Island."

"I would just hide myself away so that when he got back to the city he wouldn't be able for to find me."

"It wouldn't be a hard job for her to do, boss, 'coshe wouldn't do much hunting after her. The moment he gits back from the Island he allers goes and hangs up round some liquor saloon until he gits as full as a goat and then he goes for to climb on some policeman's eyebrow, and they run him in ag'in."

"I most certainly would get out of his way."

"Cert!" cried the boy, emphatically, the moment the young man finished the remark.

"You can bet your life on that! And so would any one else."

"I tell Sally that this durned Irish galoot ain't got no call on her, anyway. He never spent no money on her. She's allers got her own living since her mother died, and afore, too. I tell you, if I was her, I'd dust out so quick that it would make my head swim."

"It certainly is what you ought to do," the young man advised.

"The tie of relationship certainly doesn't bind you to live with such a brute. If you need any assistance, I will be glad to give it. I am not a rich man, but I've a shot or two in the locker and you are quite welcome to it."

"Bully for you!" cried Corny, who was never able to keep still.

"Say, you're a sailor, ain't you?"

"Yes; I have followed the sea for a living."

"I thought so, from yer looks."

"I haven't been able to thank you yet for coming to my aid," the girl remarked.

"Oh, don't trouble yourself about that, for it isn't worth while. But, by the way, as you live in the house, you can give me some information. I want to find a man named Thomas Maxin, who used to live in Forty-second street and moved from there to this house."

"You won't find him, boss," the boy replied, immediately.

"Why not?"

"He's passed in his checks—kicked the bucket 'bout two weeks ago."

"Dead?"

"Yes, sir-ee."

"That is unfortunate; I had hoped to gain some information from him. What has become of his family?"

"Nobody knows, I guess; but if anybody does, I kin find out for you if you want me to."

"Yes; I do. I want to see if I can get any information in regard to the old house in Forty-second street where they used to live. It has been burnt down, and as there is a mystery about the fire, for the house is unoccupied, I thought that there might be a chance for me to get a clew to the mystery from the Maxins, as they only recently moved out of the house."

"Oh, I was up to that fire!" the boy exclaimed. "But 'twas 'bout all through afore I got there."

"Say! was that yarn true 'bout the feller gitting a gal out by shinning up the telegraph-pole?"

"Yes."

"By gol! I'll bet it was you!" cried Corny, as the idea suddenly came to him.

"You're jest the kind of feller fer to do sich a thing!"

The Lightweight laughed.

"Well, I was in the neighborhood at the time; but now I must bid you adieu. Get what information you can for me in regard to these folks and I will pay you well for your trouble."

"Come to-morrow night; maybe I can find out by that time."

"All right; I'll be here."

Then Hugh took his departure.

CHAPTER XII.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION.

By this time the yard had resumed its normal quiet.

A little ruction like the one that had taken place was of too common an occurrence for the inhabitants of the tenement houses to pay much attention to after the skirmish ended.

A dozen times at least the old tenants had witnessed a battle between the big Irishman and the policemen, ending always with the downfall of McGinnis and his departure for the police station, more or less damaged.

The young man crossed the yard without exciting any attention from any one, passed through the front house, and when he gained the street hesitated for a moment to deliberate upon the next thing to be done.

Heart and soul the Lightweight had gone into the work which he had undertaken.

He had got a clew to the whereabouts of the last family who had lived in the old house, and had followed it up at once; but from the present outlook it did not seem as if it was going to profit him much.

He stood right in front of the door; the street was almost deserted, so he had opportunity for reflection without being disturbed.

"Now then the next thing to be done is to discover where this girl is to be found whom I rescued from the burning house."

"She certainly would be able to give me a clew which would aid me to unravel the mystery."

"I thank you for having saved my life!" clear and distinct came the words to the ears of the young man.

The voice was strong, sweet and musical.

The Lightweight stared about him in amazement.

Not a soul was within a hundred feet of him in any direction.

Not a woman in sight, and yet the voice seemed to be right at his elbow.

The tone was only a trifle louder than any one would use in common conversation, and yet the words came distinctly to his ears.

About a hundred feet down the street four men were grouped in a door, all sitting down, all smoking short pipes and busily engaged in discussing McGinnis's exploits.

The voice evidently could not come from them, for they were all middle-aged working-men, and by no possibility could their coarse tones be mistaken for the clear voice of a young girl.

"Do not attempt to discover where I am," continued the voice, as though the owner of it was able to see the person whom she was addressing and had noticed his look of amazement and attempt to discover from whence the voice came.

"There are certain circumstances which at present render it impossible for me to see you in person and thank you for the great service which you rendered me, but my gratitude is just as great, and I fully realize that you have placed me under an obligation which I fear I shall never be able to pay."

"Oh, don't trouble yourself on that score. You may rest easy as far as that is concerned," the young man replied.

"But I shall not rest content until I have found some way to show you how much I appreciate the noble deed by which you saved my life when I believed myself to be beyond all human aid and had commended my soul to Heaven."

"Don't speak of the subject again, I beg!" the Lightweight exclaimed.

"I only did what any other man would have done under like circumstances, if he had had the wit to think of the means by which the rescue could be effected and was possessed of the necessary skill to carry the plan out."

"The first hook-and-ladder man who arrived on the ground would have saved you beyond a doubt and thought nothing of it."

"It is quite useless for you to attempt to lessen the service," she replied.

"I fully appreciate how great it was, and I know that I owe my life to you, and while I live I shall never forget it."

"Never is a long time," he remarked.

"Long or short, you will find that I mean what I say."

"And now tell me, is there any way by which I can serve you so as to prove how great the gratitude is that I feel?"

"Gladly would I meet you face to face, but, as I have informed you, there are circumstances which for the present positively forbid it."

Hugh pondered for a moment.

This was a mysterious affair, and he did not know what to make of it.

But then everything about the affair was strange.

"This is truly romantic," he remarked.

"And I begin to believe that you are not a real flesh-and-blood girl, but a will-of-the-wisp sort of creature who could not have been harmed by the flames anyway, although I must admit you felt decidedly like a human when I carried you from the burning house."

"Oh, I am flesh and blood; there isn't any doubt about that."

"But what were you doing in the old house, which was not occupied and supposed to be securely locked?"

"That is a secret which at present I cannot reveal."

Then a sudden thought occurred to the Lightweight, and in an impulsive way he gave utterance to it at once.

"It cannot be possible that it was you who set fire to the building?" he exclaimed.

"No, upon my soul, no!" the voice replied in earnest accents.

"I do not mean to accuse you of having intentionally fired the building, but it was dark within the house and you could not have possibly found your way around it without the aid of a light, and I thought that by some accident the fire was occasioned by your light."

"No, for the light I carried was a dark-lantern—a bull's-eye lantern, you know, such as the police use, and there is no danger of fire with them."

"Then, too, I feel pretty certain that I know how the fire occurred."

"You do!" exclaimed the Lightweight, eagerly. "Well now that is exactly what I am trying to discover."

"I am sure I can aid you then by telling you what I know."

"If you remember it was a moonlight night."

"Yes, I remember."

"Of course I had no business to be in the old house, and naturally I started at every noise for fear that some one had discovered my presence there, and every once in a while I looked out of the back windows to the yard, for I gained

entrance to the house by the rear door and I had a nervous horror that somebody might find out I was in the house and lay in wait in the back yard to stop me when I went out."

"When I looked out of the windows I was careful to stand well back in the room so that if there was any one in the yard they would not be able to see me."

"About five minutes before the fire occurred I looked out of one of the windows and saw a man steal cautiously into the yard through the back gate."

"He was evidently bent on mischief, for his manner plainly indicated that he was afraid of attracting attention, and so I watched him with a horrid fear that he intended to enter the house, and if that was his purpose I did not know what I should do, for I recognized the man."

"He formerly lived in this neighborhood, and was reputed to be one of the greatest villains in the city."

"But he did not come to the door which led into the house, but went to the one which led into the rear apartment of the store."

"I crept close to the window and watched him; he did not seem to have any difficulty at all in opening the door and then entered the apartment."

"I felt sure that he had not come for any good purpose, but I could not guess what he intended to do."

"I placed my ear close to the floor in order to listen."

"And then all of a sudden I heard a crash like the breaking of glass—"

"That was when he flung the lamp down so as to make it look as if the lamp had exploded and so set fire to the place."

"Yes, no doubt that is what was done," she observed; "but at the time I never dreamed of such a thing, and I listened, having no idea that the house was on fire until I heard the people cry out down-stairs and smelt the smoke."

"Then of course I thought I understood why the man had entered the house."

"I rose to my feet and endeavored to escape, but I had waited too long; the stairway was all on fire, and as I was well-nigh suffocated by the smoke, I ran up-stairs thinking I could get out by the scuttle on the roof, and the rest you know."

"You have given me some important information, thanks to the lucky accident of your happening to know the man who undoubtedly set fire to the house," Hugh observed.

"I am very glad indeed to be able to be of service to you," she replied.

"The man is named John Buddock, but he is more often called Black Bud, and he is as desperate a ruffian as can be found in all New York."

"I will see to him at once; but in regard to yourself. How long will you keep up this mystery?"

"I do not know—I cannot tell at present."

"Suppose I want to see you?"

"Come here any night at ten and I will be here. And now good-by."

"Good-by."

The Lightweight waited for a few moments.

"Are you still there?" he asked.

No answer came.

"Quite a mystery!" he mused; "but it will keep, while I seek the aid of the detectives and ascertain all I can in regard to this Black Bud, for I fancy he is the man I want beyond a doubt."

Straight to Police Head-quarters he went.

CHAPTER XIII.

STRIKING A TRAIL.

THE rough, sailor-like appearance of the amateur detective was not a passport to the good opinions of the astute officers in charge of the Police Head-quarters, and when he made known his desire to see the superintendent upon important business they were rather inclined to put obstacles in the way.

But Hugh Strong had dealt with too many men in too many countries in his time to be turned from his purpose by the red-tapeism of a petty official.

Politely but firmly he told them that he must see the superintendent on particular business, and when they demurred admitting him to the presence of the chief and endeavored to ascertain what the nature of his business was, he quietly told them that it was so important that it could be confided to the ears of the chief alone, or to the official who represented the chief in his absence.

"Well, the chief ain't here, anyway, and the Inspector is out, too," the doorman said at last.

But just as he spoke, in came Inspector Burke with his detectives, just returned from their unsuccessful raid after the Cracksman King.

The Inspector was a far keener-eyed man than his subordinates, and he saw at a glance that the visitor was no ordinary man, and so when he learned that the other had come upon important business he invited him at once into his private office.

The Inspector was not in a good-humor, for

the unaccountable escape of the Cracksman King, after he had thought the game was in the trap, annoyed him greatly, but he concealed the feeling as well as possible and settled down at his official desk, prepared to ~~listen~~ with due attention to his visitor.

The Lightweight sat down in the chair indicated by the officer and immediately proceeded to business.

He related the understanding which had grown up between himself and the wealthy merchant, Franklyn Buckingham, and how he had undertaken the task of hunting down the secret enemy who had for so long a time annoyed the opulent New Yorker.

The Inspector leaned back in his chair and shook his head as if in doubt.

"Well, I wish you all the luck in the world," he said, "and I don't wish to discourage you a particle, but did Mr. Buckingham inform you that he had employed the best detectives in the country for years, both public and private, spending money as freely as though it was only water, and yet nothing tangible at all came of it?"

"Oh, yes, he fully posted me in regard to the affair in all its details," Hugh Strong replied.

And then he added with a quiet smile:

"I suppose it seems monstrous to you to see a man like myself, without any experience in this peculiar line, undertake to successfully accomplish the task which has baffled the best men in the business."

"Well, I must candidly admit that as far as I can see there doesn't appear to be much show for you," the Inspector replied.

"I can try, you know, and if I fail, there will be no harm done."

"That's true enough."

"Now this fire up-town in Forty-second street, the last blow aimed at Mr. Buckingham, as he believes, although it may be that it was accidental," Hugh observed.

"Yes, it looks that way to me. I think it was accidental."

"The Dutchman, and his boy try to get out of it, of course, but there isn't much doubt in my mind that the fire arose from a piece of gross carelessness on their part."

"They left the lamp burning near the coal-oil barrels, probably were careless in regard to filling it and trimming the wick, the oil ran low and the lamp exploded, and that is the whole thing in a nutshell."

"Mr. Buckingham doesn't think so, though," the Lightweight observed.

"No; but he has got to be really a monomaniac on the subject of this secret enemy," said the Inspector.

"You see, I know the old gentleman like a book. I worked on this case for him over a year; devoted almost my entire time to it, and when I got through I wasn't any wiser than when I began."

"Of course, the old gentleman is a perfect brick and paid me like a prince, and I wouldn't like to say to him that he has got a bee in his bonnet on this subject, but I really think he has."

"But you do not doubt that there has been some enemy, who, remaining in the background, has been trying his best to damage Mr. Buckingham?"

"Oh, yes; there isn't the least doubt about that, for these disasters have been too severe and too frequent to be the result of accident alone, and then some of them could not possibly have been the result of accident."

"My own idea exactly."

"But what I meant to say was that as Mr. Buckingham has got the idea into his head that he has a secret enemy who for years has been trying to do him all the damage he possibly could, he has fallen into the belief that every stroke of misfortune that comes to him is the work of this foe, when in reality some of the ill-luck is due to accident alone."

"I understand," the Lightweight remarked.

"But in the case of this fire Mr. Buckingham is right in believing that an incendiary has been at work."

"That is a bold statement, unless you have proof to back it up," the Inspector observed.

"I have," Hugh responded, quietly.

The officer looked astonished.

"The deuce you say!" he exclaimed.

"Well, I had a talk with the insurance men who have been looking into the matter, and they told me that in their opinion there wasn't any doubt that the fire was accidental."

"I regret that I am obliged to differ with such experts, but I have been informed by a person who was an eye-witness to the fact that just before the fire a certain man, who is known to be a rascal of the first water, entered the house by way of the back gate, the lock of which he picked, then went into the house, remained there a few minutes, and just before the fire broke out departed in hot haste."

"That certainly does look suspicious," the Inspector commented.

"Have you any objection to putting me in possession of the name of the man?"

"Certainly not. The object of my visit was to put you in possession of all the facts. He is

called John Buddock—Black Bud by his associates."

The official was surprised by the unexpected information.

"Well, upon my word!" he exclaimed, "that is about the last name I expected to hear, but I guess you know what you are talking about in the matter, for I have been on the track of the fellow to-night, but he has been shrewd enough to outwit me, although I will be hanged if I understand how he did it, for I thought I had him dead to rights."

"Now the point in this matter is, one of my men got on the track of Black Bud in a sporting crib up-town in the neighborhood of the street where the fire took place, and the time when my spy struck the trail was just about an hour after the burning of the house."

"That does seem to confirm my story, and in my mind there isn't the least doubt that what I have said is true, for my informant I believe to be perfectly trustworthy."

The Inspector was silent for a few moments, revolving the matter over in his mind.

In the beginning when his visitor had announced that he had undertaken the task which had baffled the shrewdest and most experienced men in the detective line, both police and private, he was disposed to repeat the old adage that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread," but now this disclosure had been made it was apparent that the amateur had succeeded in gaining a clue such as no man who had worked on the job had ever succeeded in picking up.

"If Black Bud was the man who started the fire it was plain, of course, that he merely acted for some one else in the matter, for he personally had nothing to gain by the destruction of the old house," the Inspector remarked at last.

"That's my idea; and when we get at his employer we will not be far from the merchant's secret enemy."

"True enough, but the first thing is to get at Buddock, and that will be no easy job let me tell you. I thought I had him foul to-night, but he slipped through my fingers, though it looked as if he was as safe as a rat in a trap."

Then the Inspector told the story of the descent of the detectives upon the shanty castle of Daddy Blazes.

"I don't see how Buddock managed to get out of the house," the official said in conclusion, "and the more I think of the matter the greater becomes my belief that Black Bud did not get out of the house, but was concealed somewhere in the shanty at the very time that we entered it."

"This Daddy Blazes is a shrewd old hound. He has been doing crooked work for years, but the police have never been able to get a pull on him."

"He may trip some time though. Suppose I try my luck with him," Hugh remarked.

"Have you a warrant for Buddock so that I will have power to take my man if I run foul of him?"

"Yes, here it is," and the Inspector took the legal document from his pocket and gave it to the other.

Then he explained exactly how the den of Daddy Blazes was situated and how to get at it.

"You ought to have assistance though," he said in conclusion. "No single man can take a prisoner out of that neighborhood. To try it would sure cost the man his life."

"Oh, I will not take any big risks; life is too precious," the Lightweight responded with a smile as he took his departure.

CHAPTER XIV.

A VISITOR.

"Yes, yes, the dogs are puzzled and don't know what to make of it," Daddy Blazes repeated.

"And it is not often either that the brutes are at fault."

"Maybe it is only some one passing by," Black Bud suggested.

"Oh, no, they wouldn't act in that way. It is somebody who is coming straight to the house with the idea of coming in."

"The dogs won't have that, will they?" exclaimed the cracksman rising in alarm.

"No, no, don't you be alarmed; the dogs are fierce brutes and they would tear anybody all to pieces if they opened the gate and attempted to come to the house before I gave the word."

Just at this point the sound of angry growls arose on the still night air.

The brutes had evidently gone to the gate and they were, dog fashion, warning the stranger, for it was, that they would make it particularly warm for him if he attempted to approach the house.

"Mighty strange time for any visitor to come," the cracksman growled, a little uneasy in his mind.

"Not at all," Daddy Blazes responded with a grin; "I have some customers—valuable ones too—who never come until after midnight."

"They are modest, retiring creatures, and they shrink from meeting the inquiring gaze of the world."

"But as a rule the dogs always have sense enough to know my customers, and I don't

understand this uncertainty on their part at all."

The beasts were still snarling at the gate, and amid their growls a human voice could be heard endeavoring to pacify them.

"Hadn't I better get into my hole again?" Black Bud asked, nervously, for he had a suspicion that the detectives, not satisfied with the failure of their first attempt, were going to try some other game.

"Yes, but not in the same place," Daddy Blazes replied.

"If this is a customer coming on business I mustn't put you where you can overhear the conversation, for that would be the square thing, you know."

"Oh, I wouldn't give the snap away!" Buddock declared.

"Well, if you don't know anything about it, you can't," the old man rejoined, with a chuckle.

Then he went to the open fireplace in the center of the chimney, touched a concealed spring and the whole back of the fireplace swung out just like the door of a safe, and a small cavity was revealed, down which narrow steps led into an underground apartment apparently.

Buddock looked on with astonished eyes.

"In order to save you from the police I am revealing the secrets of my castle," Daddy Blazes remarked, impressively.

"I am forced to trust to your honor not to betray me."

"Oh, you can depend upon me. I'm true blue! I never squealed on a pal in my life!" Black Bud hastened to declare.

"If you do betray the secrets which I have confided to you, and I shall be sure to find it out if you do, I will take the most fearful vengeance!" the old man warned.

"Don't you worry 'bout that," and the outlaw commenced to descend the stairs.

"Say, there ain't any danger of a man smothering to death down here, is there?"

The question was a natural one, for the pit into which the stairs descended was as black as night and a damp, unwholesome current of air arose from it.

"No, no, no fear of that," Daddy Blazes replied.

"Take a seat upon the bottom step and wait until I call you."

"All right, but I say, don't keep me down in this hole any longer than you can help."

"Curse me! if it don't seem more like a grave than anything else," the cracksman added with a shiver.

"I hav'n't given my last croak yet and I ain't ready to hop into my little coffin."

"Don't worry yourself; you are a long way off from death, for the chances are a thousand to one that when you die it will be by the aid of the hangman's rope," retorted the old man with a demoniac chuckle.

"You lie, you old scoundrel!" cried the ruffian in a rage.

Then Daddy Blazes put an end to the conversation by closing the massive door, and when this was done it would be a shrewd man indeed who would suspect that there was anything out of the way about the rudely-constructed fireplace.

Hastening to the door the old man opened it and looked out into the night.

A well-built fellow, who looked like a sailor, was at the gate endeavoring to conciliate the dogs.

But the brutes turned a deaf ear to his blandishments, and showed their teeth in the most warlike way, whenever the man made a movement to enter the gate.

Through the crack of the door—for the old man only opened it just enough to enable him to get a view of the fellow at the gate—earnestly surveyed the applicant for admission.

The inspection was a favorable one, for though the man did not look like a crook, yet there was nothing about him to suggest that he was a detective in disguise.

Daddy Blazes had done considerable trade with sailors in his time, fellows who had gone in to make a stake by doing a little bit of smuggling, and it was well known to the men "along shore" that Daddy Blazes would give as much for smuggled articles, provided they could be easily disposed of, as any "fence" in New York.

So the moment the old man discovered that his visitor looked like a sailor, he instantly suspected the errand upon which he came.

The man was a stranger, but that mattered not.

Strangers sought Daddy Blazes every day, posted by friends in regard to the location and peculiar business of the king of shanty hill.

"What do you want?" asked the old man, opening the door wider so that the stranger could see him.

"I want to see Daddy Blazes," the man replied.

"Well, you do see him. I'm the man, and now what do you want?"

"I'm a sailor, just off the ship Golden Dragon from Calcutta."

The old man pricked up his ears.

Calcutta was a good port for a man to hail

from who desired to do a little crooked business.

The rich East could boast of half-a-dozen articles, all valuable, all easily disposed of, and as the duties were high, a good profit could be gained.

"Yes, yes, I've a good many friends in the Calcutta trade."

"Right you are, skipper!" exclaimed the sailor in his rather boisterous way, a peculiarity common to the men who follow the sea, for few of them have low, soft voices.

"Some of my mates have been a-telling me on you for many a voyage, and they said as how if it ever fell in my trick to do a leetle bit of business on my own account you were the man of all men to cast a line to, and here I am, my hearty."

Daddy Blazes cast a quick glance around; not a soul was in sight.

Shantytown was buried in slumber, and only the goats on the rocks trying to extract nourishment from the labels which they had stripped from old tin cans, and the dogs prowling restless around in search of stray bones, seemed to be awake.

"Come in, my friend; I am always glad to see a sailor who has the wit to do a stroke of business for himself," said the old man.

The dogs had stopped their snarling upon the appearance of their master, but still kept diligent watch at the gate, and the moment the sailor laid his hand upon it to accept Daddy Blazes's invitation they were up in arms.

"Lie down, you brutes!" commanded Daddy Blazes.

"Didn't you hear me invite the gentleman to come in? What is the matter with you? Have you lost your ears?"

The dogs slunk away and the sailor entered.

Daddy Blazes conducted him into the house, and bade him be seated, placing a chair by the side of the table which stood in the middle of the room.

Then the old man went to the closet which was at the further end of the room and brought from it a bottle of rum and a couple of glasses.

"Talking is dry work," Daddy Blazes remarked with a grin as he helped himself to a liberal supply of the fluid, and then pushed the bottle over to the sailor.

"There's some good old Jamaica which never paid Uncle Sam a cent of duty. I got ten gallons of it from a friend of mine who is on one of the West India steamers, and he knows what good rum is, and I always keep this for my sailor pals."

"And I reckon you never ran across a sailor yet who wasn't anxious to splice the main-brace, which is nautical for taking a drink," remarked the other, as he poured out a liberal allowance of the rum into his glass.

"Oh, no, a sailor is a man who knows how to live!"

And then the two pledged each other and the liquor disappeared.

"Now, Daddy, I've got a valuable thing here which I want you to put a price on."

"All right; what is it?"

"Here it is," and then the sailor produced from an inside pocket a package carefully done up in oiled silk.

Daddy Blazes opened it; and when the wrappers were removed a legal-looking document appeared. He glared in amazement, for it was a warrant for the arrest of John Buddock.

CHAPTER XV.

PUTTING ON THE SCREWS.

THE old man was thoroughly astonished, for he had not the least anticipation that there was any trick in the matter.

And even now that the discovery was made, he did not know exactly what to make of it.

The sailor did not seem to be a detective in disguise, and if he was, what could be his object in playing such a queer trick as this?

True, he had managed to gain admission to the shanty, but what earthly good would that do him?

"What is the meaning of this?" the old man asked, bending his shrewd eyes upon his visitor, who sat quietly upon the other side of the table, not changing countenance in the least when the warrant came to sight.

"What is that thing worth?"

"Nothing!" responded Daddy Blazes, pushing the paper across the table in the most contemptuous manner.

"Nothing?"

"Of course not! What on earth do you suppose I want of such a thing?"

"I thought it might be worth something to the man Black Bud, you know; he's a friend of yours."

"No such thing!" cried Daddy Blazes, sharply.

"Well, an acquaintance, anyway."

"No, no, I never saw the man in my life!"

"Then you couldn't tell me where to find him?" and the sailor—who, as the reader has probably guessed by this time, was no other than the Lightweight—looked around the apartment as if he expected to see Black Bud lurking in some corner.

"No, no, I know nothing at all about the fellow!" Daddy Blazes cried, testily.

The old man was annoyed at the persistence of the stranger.

He was no regular detective, that was plain, and the idea that this outsider should attempt the task which had baffled the best men in the force seemed supremely ridiculous to the master of Shantyville.

"Well, I am sorry for that, for I want to see him on some particular business," the intruder remarked, with the most provoking coolness.

"Your wishes cannot be gratified, and if you have no other business the quicker you get out of here the better."

"Oh, yes, but John Buddock is here, you know," the other replied.

The old man looked at him for a moment in astonishment.

The assurance of the fellow amazed him.

"See here, you want to get yourself into trouble I guess," the old man exclaimed.

"Oh, no, I am one of the easiest men in the world to get along with—that is, if I always have everything my own way," the other replied, with an easy assurance that fairly made Daddy Blazes gasp with amazement.

"See here, are you anxious to get killed?"

"Oh, no; life is too sweet, and I intend to cling to it as long as I can."

"I've only two words to say to you—get out!" the old man exclaimed, and he motioned significantly to the door.

"And I have only two words to say in reply—nary git!"

"For the last time I warn you that you are putting your life in peril!"

"Bosh! what do you suppose I care for that? I came here to see John Buddock, messmate, and I am not going away until I do see him. I know that you have got him hid here somewhere, so you might as well trot him out first as last."

"Look here! you are a bold fellow, and I hate to see you killed without warning!" Daddy Blazes exclaimed, impelled to give the young man a last warning.

"You have poked your head into a regular hornets' nest here, and you don't stand any more chance to get out with your life once the trap is sprung than a toad does of changing into an elephant."

"Now, then, you are a bold fellow, and I hate to sacrifice you, although you have tried to take me at a disadvantage."

"The door is open—get out, and thank your lucky stars that you have the chance to escape with your life from the worst trap that you ever got into."

"I imagine from your words that you intend to call some gang to your aid," the other observed, in the coolest possible manner.

"Oh, I shall not have to call; the gang come by magic at my wish!" Daddy Blazes exclaimed, with a grin.

"If you utter a sound it will cost you your life!" cried the Lightweight, with firm determination.

"Oh, you don't mean?" exclaimed the old man, with a mocking accent.

"Yes, I do; I've entered for the war, and I mean to fight it out to the best of my ability."

"Don't threaten me; I'm awful scared, and is the kind of man I am!" Daddy Blazes remarked.

And then with a sudden motion he produced a revolver which he had secretly drawn under the cover of the table.

At the same moment the clang of an alarm-bell sounded on the air, and the instant the sounds broke on the stillness of the night the dogs set up a most furious barking.

Hugh understood well enough what all this meant.

The bell was connected by wire with a spring underneath the table, and by simply pressing his foot upon this the old man had rung this bell.

This was the signal that there was danger afoot, and that all the inhabitants of Shantyville must hurry to the assistance of their chief.

The barking of the dogs too tended to alarm the settlement.

From what he had heard of the place, he knew that his life would not be worth the fee of a pin if Daddy Blazes's satellites once got their hands upon him.

And he was as quick to act as the leader of this outlaw gang had been.

With one ingenious spring headlong over the table he went, striking Daddy Blazes full in the breast with his head, sending him over as though he had been struck with a battering-ram.

The old man had no opportunity to discharge the revolver, although it was a self-cocker, only requiring a single pull on the trigger to raise the hammer and discharge the weapon.

The force of the fall sent the weapon spinning out of his hand, and the violence with which he struck the floor half-stunned him.

When he came to his senses, he found that the intruder had him by the throat and had dragged him to the door.

The Lightweight had sprung so deftly over

the table that the leap had not disturbed the lamp in the least, so there was plenty of light.

When Daddy Blazes opened his eyes, he found himself propped up against the door, the stranger having him by the throat and wedging his knuckles in against the flesh until he was half-strangled.

In his other hand his assailant brandished a sharp-pointed, keen-edged knife, and this weapon he brought so near the throat of Daddy Blazes that the point grazed the skin.

This maneuver only took a few seconds.

It was only a minute from the time that the old man gave the alarm until he found himself held against the door with the knife at his throat.

Without the dogs were still barking furiously, springing up against the door and then racing down to the gate, intent upon warning the settlement that danger was afoot.

The operation had been performed so quickly that Daddy Blazes hardly knew what to make of it.

Without could be heard the sounds of the men of Shantyville, gathering for the fray, alarmed by the sound of the bell as well as by the furious barking of the dogs.

"You scoundrel!" gasped Daddy Blazes, hardly able to speak from the effects of the shock and the rage that devoured him; "my gang will soon come, and they will tear you all to pieces!"

"Not much!" exclaimed Hugh, rubbing the point of the knife in an extremely suggestive way up and down on the throat of the old man.

"Why won't they?"

"Because they will not get the chance. In the first place this old shanty is a pretty strong fortification!"

And then suddenly releasing his hold on the old man he shot the bolts of the door home to their sockets, and the moment the trick was accomplished resumed his former grip, and this was done so quickly that the old man had no opportunity to escape.

"I have two pair of revolvers, and I reckon I can stand a good siege here before I will be compelled to give up the fort."

"Then, too, the sound of the firing will attract the police, who have been warned to keep a watch upon this neighborhood, and before your gang can break their way in here the blue-coats will be upon them, and they will make short work of you ruffians."

Daddy Blazes almost choked with rage, for he realized that every word his captor spoke was true.

"And then there's another reason why your gang will not trouble me. I hold you, their master, in my power."

A curse rose to the lips of the baffled villain, but the touch of the cold steel against his throat checked it.

"When they come to the door and ask why the alarm was given you must tell them it was an accident. You gave the signal without intending to do so, and that there isn't anything the matter."

"Never, I will die first!" gurgled the old man, desperately.

"Well, you can have your choice."

And the point of steel entered the flesh.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DESPERATE THREAT.

THE heart of Daddy Blazes gave a great leap. Until he felt the point of the knife he did not fully realize how completely he was in the power of the stranger who had in so dextrous a manner gained an entrance to his castle.

"You will not dare," the old man gasped.

"My gang when they get hold of you will tear you limb from limb."

"When they get hold of me is well put in," the other retorted.

"For between you and me and the bed-post, I don't intend your gang shall get hold of me."

"You will be hung for my murder!" exclaimed Daddy Blazes, feeling that he was in the toils, yet determined to fight vigorously.

"Not at all; I struck you in self-defense. That will be my plea; you assaulted me with a revolver—my life was in danger, and I was compelled to kill you."

Daddy Blazes writhed in agony. His captor was prepared for him at all points.

By this time about a dozen of the neighbors, who had been aroused by the alarm, had gathered at the door of the shanty.

The dogs, understanding that help had arrived, had stopped their barking, and were snuffing about in front of the door.

"W'ot's the matter, Daddy, w'ot's broke?" asked one of the outsiders, who took it upon himself to act as spokesman for the rest.

"Tell them that you gave the alarm by accident, and that everything is all right!" hissed the Lightweight in the ear of the old man, and again Daddy Blazes felt the keen point of the knife piercing the skin of the throat.

The old man was cowed by the peril which confronted him, for he was not composed of the stuff of which heroes are made, and the determined accents of Hugh made him believe that the young man would not hesitate to take his life if he attempted to give an alarm.

"W'ot is it, Daddy, w'ot's up?" repeated the man on the outside, finding that there wasn't any reply to his first inquiry.

"Nothing, everything is all right, boys," responded the old man, doing his utmost to conceal the agitation under which he labored.

"I gave the alarm by accident, that is all."

At this announcement the men outside loudly expressed their dissatisfaction, and they plainly told the old man that he ought to be ashamed of himself to come any such games as that.

They had got the idea into their heads that it was a trick on his part to test their vigilance, and they were justly indignant.

They expressed their opinion of a man who would do such a thing in pretty plain terms, and then retired grumbling at a great rate.

But the dogs were not as easily satisfied as the humans, and still remained snuffing at the door and snarling, angrily.

"Bid the dogs be quiet!" Hugh commanded.

Daddy Blazes obeyed; scolded the brutes and bade them lie down.

Obedient to the voice of the master they betook themselves to their lairs.

Again all was quiet.

"There, we worked that trick pretty well," the intruder remarked.

"Now, I fancy we are secure from interruption for some time."

"You are playing a bold game but it will not work," Daddy Blazes remarked.

"The man you are in search of is not here, and you are only wasting your time."

"Then my suspicion that he is concealed in this shanty is not correct?" Hugh remarked with a glance around.

"Do you see any place here likely to afford concealment to anything as big as a man?" the old man inquired with a sarcastic expression upon his ugly face.

"Oh, no, but it wouldn't be much of a hiding-place, I reckon, if it could be discovered at the first glance," the young man answered.

"This is a ramshackle old ruin and I haven't the least doubt that you have a half a dozen good places to stow away a man who is wanted by the police."

"Go ahead and search; if you succeed in discovering what you are looking for you will be a shrewder and a luckier man than I take you to be," sneered Daddy Blazes.

"Oh, no, old gentleman, I don't intend to do anything of the kind," the intruder answered.

"I don't want to search your shanty. You know every hole and hiding-place that there is in it and can give me all the information I want."

"No, no, you know more about it than I do, for you assert that there are things here of which I haven't any knowledge," retorted the old man, with a sneer.

"You speak of holes and hiding-places, and I don't know anything about such secrets. I don't doubt there are plenty of rat-holes in the place, but I hardly think you expect to find the man of whom you are in search concealed in so small a hiding-place," and the old man laughed outright in Hugh's face as he spoke.

The Firefly was puzzled.

The old saying that it only takes a single man to lead a horse to water but that a hundred can't make him drink unless he so desires at once occurred to him.

He hadn't the least doubt that the cracksman, Black Bud, was concealed in some secret hiding-place within the shanty, but he was at a loss how to proceed to force the old man to reveal his whereabouts to him if he was obstinate in regard to the matter and had made up his mind to swear he knew nothing about it.

The only course open to him was to attempt to force the old man to reveal the secrets of the shanty, for there wasn't the least doubt that he would be deaf to all persuasion.

If the old man would not speak, then all he could do would be to bind the old villain securely and try to ascertain the location of the cracksman's hiding-place himself.

It would never do to attempt this work with the old man at liberty, for Daddy Blazes would be certain to attack him in the rear the moment he got an opportunity.

"You refuse then to reveal to me where John Buddock is concealed?" he said.

"Oh, no, I don't refuse to do anything of the kind," the old man answered, with a grin.

"I merely tell you that you have made a mistake."

"John Buddock is not in the house, and I don't know anything about him."

"I know better; I know that he is, and that you can reveal to me where he is hidden if you choose to do so."

"Oh, there isn't the least use to talk to a man as obstinate as you are," retorted Daddy Blazes, shaking his head gravely, as much as to say how grieved he was to see a man so grounded in conceit.

"I tell you the man isn't here. I told you so at the beginning, and I shall not sing any other song if you stay here until every hair on your head is as gray as the coat of a badger."

"You will force me to adopt some unpleasant measures," threatened the young man, his brows

contracting and a look of stern determination appearing on his face.

"You can kill me if you like!" exclaimed Daddy Blazes. "That will not alter the fact, you know."

"Whether I am alive or dead, it don't make any difference."

"You will not find John Buddock in this house, because he isn't here. You are only wasting your time, and if you will take my advice you will get out and endeavor to strike the trail elsewhere."

"As you are so obstinate, I shall be obliged to be obstinate, too."

"Oh, I don't fear your threats," retorted the old man.

"As I said before, you may kill me, but you will not find the man you seek in this place."

"You will force me to be under the disagreeable necessity of putting you in such a condition that you will not be able to interfere with me while I search the apartment," Hugh observed.

"Oh, you can go ahead without troubling your head about me!" Daddy Blazes exclaimed.

"I shall not interfere with you. I know that you will not find John Buddock, for he isn't here, and after you have searched the apartment and satisfied yourself of that fact you will be content to go away."

"Unfortunately, Daddy Blazes, I have not that confidence in you which your words ought to give me."

"If I don't fix you so that you will not be capable of doing harm, you are just the man to try to lay me out at the first convenient opportunity, so, if you please, I will fix you so you can only play the part of a spectator for the next half hour or so."

"Go ahead! I don't care what you do!" snarled the old man in wrath.

"You will not find Black Bud all the same though."

"I will be better satisfied on that point after I make a careful search," the Lightweight rejoined.

"You have him hid in some hole here, and I'll have him out if I have to burn your old shanty to the ground."

"I fancy that when I apply the torch to your old rookery it will be apt to make my man put in an appearance."

"You will not dare to commit such an outrage!" Daddy Blazes cried, fairly trembling with passion.

"Oh, won't I? You see you have never been fairly introduced to me yet, or else you would never make such a statement as that."

"I tell you what it is, Daddy Blazes, you have got hold of a man this time who is game to do almost anything, and don't you forget it."

"Now then, if you will have the kindness to hold out your delicate wrists while I snap a pair of bracelets upon them, I will be much obliged to you," and as he spoke Hugh drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

CHAPTER XVII.

TURNING THE TABLES.

"Oh, go ahead! There isn't any use of putting handcuffs upon me, I shall not interfere with you!" the old man exclaimed, who did not relish this part of the programme at all.

"Unfortunately I have not that confidence in human nature which I ought to have to warrant me in placing faith in your assurance."

"I prefer to trust to the handcuffs."

"If I fix you so that you cannot possibly do any damage, you will be sure not to do any."

"A man as sensible as you are must see that that argument is a perfectly sound one, so hold up your hands and say no more about it."

But in place of doing so Daddy Blazes suddenly sprang at the young man with the ferocity of a tiger.

Hugh had relaxed his grip upon the old man in order to snap on the handcuffs, and Daddy Blazes was prompt to seize the favorable opportunity.

From the experience that the old man already had of the strength and skill of the intruder, this seemed to be a foolish movement, and the Lightweight was taken by surprise, for he had not expected anything of the kind, for he thought he had convinced the Shanty King that he stood no chance at all with him in a hand to hand encounter; therefore, when the old man grappled with him it seemed like the work of an idiot.

But assistance was at hand, and Daddy Blazes was aware of the fact.

The old man faced the fireplace while Hugh had his back to it, and just as the young man produced the handcuffs, the back of the fireplace had opened slowly and Daddy Blazes saw that the cracksman was on the watch.

And the moment that the old man grappled with the intruder John Buddock hastened to his assistance.

From his pocket the new-comer drew the cracksman's favorite weapon, the sand-club, which is simply a case of stout cloth, about as big around as a policeman's club, filled with sand.

A blow on the head from this novel tool—a weapon borrowed from the villains of the far

eastern clime, the land of the Orient—delivered by the practiced and powerful arm of a man used to wielding it will most effectually stun the victim without hardly leaving a bruise.

With right good will did the cracksman strike down the young man who, the moment Daddy Blazes grappled with him had seized him with a grip which in a few moments would have strangled him.

The first blow made the Lightweight's senses reel.

He released his grip on the old man and attempted to wheel around to face this new antagonist.

And as he did so he received the second stroke, and this felled him prostrate to the floor.

The fight was ended, for Hugh Strong had been knocked senseless.

The moment the Lightweight had released Daddy Blazes, the old man had gone down all in a heap, for the choking he had received had almost strangled him, and the moment that John Buddock had disposed of the daring intruder he hastened to the assistance of the old man.

"How is it, Daddy?" he asked. "Are you about ready to croak?" and as he spoke he helped the old man to his feet.

"The scoundrel choked me so that I can hardly breathe!" the old man gasped.

"He is a muscular fiend," the cracksman remarked, as he surveyed the prostrate man with a critical eye.

"About as well-built a fellow as I have run across for a dog's age."

"Is he dead?" the old man asked, rapidly recovering his wind now that he was free from the grasp of his powerful antagonist.

"Oh, no; he's worth a dozen dead men," the other replied.

"You can't kill a chap of this kind with a couple of cracks on the head."

"He's too well put up and got too much life in him for that."

"If you want to kill a fellow like this one, you must let a brick house fall on him."

"Well, I'm glad that he isn't dead," and Daddy Blazes glared at the prostrate man with an expression of the most intense hate on his distorted face, so that he looked uglier and more like a demon than ever.

"It was a lucky thing for you, old man, that I came just as I did," the cracksman remarked.

"This fellow would have made short work of you if I hadn't laid him out with those taps on the head."

"I knew you were all in readiness to come out or else I wouldn't have tried to grapple with him," the old man explained.

"I am not so young as I once was, yet I can hold my own with any ordinary man, but this wretch is a very demon, and I stood no more chance with him than a boy of twelve would stand with me."

"But I saw the back of the fireplace open, and I knew you were on the watch, and so I grappled with him in order to give you a chance to come at him in the rear."

"And between us we laid him out in a very scientific manner."

"But how did you happen to discover the spring which opens the door?" the old man asked.

"By accident; your dogs kicked up such an infernal row that the noise they made reached even down into my den, and I fancied that all the fat was in the fire, so I came up the stairs to see if I could discover what was the matter, but I couldn't hear a word of what was going on here, although I could plainly make out that a conversation of some kind was being carried on."

"I sat on the top step and rested my hand against the door, and the first thing I knew I felt something give under my fingers, and then, to my no small astonishment, the door began to open."

"You happened by accident to touch the secret spring, which controls the latch of the door," the old man explained.

"You are right it was by accident, for when I first came up the stairs I searched high and low for the spring and couldn't strike it to save me."

"But I say, what are you going to do with this fellow?" and as he spoke the cracksman gave the body of the insensible man a careless push with his foot.

"And by the way I wonder who he is?"

"You do not recognize him?" Daddy Blazes asked.

"No, he is a new man to me."

"A detective evidently, for this sailor rig is only a disguise."

"Yes, a new hand at the bellows, and a mighty dangerous one I think he is likely to prove, for there are few men on the force that would have the pluck, single-handed, to venture into your den with the idea of taking a prisoner out of it."

"But I say, now that you have laid him out what are you going to do with him?"

"I am going to stow him away for awhile until I can have an opportunity to talk to him," the old man replied.

"He has played a bold game with me, and

now that it is my turn I intend to put the screws on him in a way that he will despise."

"I am going to find out all about him. He is no common detective, I feel sure of that, and I am anxious to learn who it was that put him up to attempt this job."

"Now, then, I am going to reveal to you one of the secrets of my hovel here and I rely upon your honor not to betray it."

"Daddy, no pal ever yet had cause to complain that Black Bud ever went back on him," the cracksman replied.

"You have kept faith with me in this thing, and hang me if I peach on you while a chance for life remains."

"Keep faith with me and you will never regret it," the old man said.

Then he went to the further corner of the room, and lifted up a trap-door, which was so skillfully contrived that the most careful examination would not be apt to discover it.

But when the trap-door was raised, under it appeared the solid rock which extended under nearly the whole of the shanty, so that if any prying spy had hit upon the trap-door, the rock underneath would be all that could be seen.

But the rock was not a part of the one upon which the shanty was founded, only a thin slab which, being lifted up, disclosed a narrow flight of steps leading down into an underground apartment.

"Now, can you slide the fellow down the trap-door while I hold the light?" Daddy Blazes asked.

"Oh, yes, I guess I can manage it."

Then while Daddy Blazes held the lamp Black Bud conveyed the senseless man down into the underground apartment.

It was a good-sized room about twenty feet square; there was an old table and a couple of stools in the middle of the room, and a heap of straw in one corner was evidently intended for a bed.

In obedience to Daddy Blazes's instructions, the man placed the senseless form of the Lightweight upon the heap of straw in the corner, and then "went through him" carefully.

Nothing of any importance rewarded the search—no documents, which was chiefly what the old man was after, for he had hoped to light upon some instructions which would give him an idea who it was that had set so determined a foe upon his track.

All that was valuable upon his person besides his weapons was a small sum of money in his wallet, and this Daddy Blazes handed to the cracksman.

"You take the money, and I'll hang on to the tools," the old man said.

This arrangement satisfied Buddock.

Then the handcuffs were snapped upon Hugh's wrists and he was left alone in the dark vault to wake to consciousness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN IMPORTANT GUEST.

AND now leaving the den of the Shanty King and inmates for awhile, we must transfer our attention to another dilapidated house in the same region and only a short distance from the abode of Daddy Blazes, and relate what took place in this quarter on the same evening that the events we have just described occurred.

The house of which we speak had a larger window than the majority of the shanties could boast, and over the door was a rudely-painted sign which informed the public that it was:

"MRS. O'FLANNIGAN'S GROCERY STORE."

Mrs. O'Flannigan—Mrs. Biddy O'Flannigan to give the woman her full name, a point upon which she was rather particular—was a tall, muscular dame on the shady side of forty.

A woman who, as far as strength and pugilistic skill went, could hold her own with any ordinary man.

The shanty settlement could boast as many toughs among its inhabitants as any other portion of the great metropolis of like size, but there wasn't any of them that was anxious to measure strength with the widow O'Flannigan when she got on the war-path.

And yet the woman, to look at her, displayed in her face no indication of what a terrible creature she was when her blood was up.

She had rather a motherly, good-natured face, and when she talked with her soft brogue—she was a south of Ireland woman—and her wheedling ways one who didn't know the woman would be apt to imagine—to use the old saying—that butter wouldn't melt in her mouth.

The widow had seen far better days than one would imagine from her present position.

She had been a nurse in some of the best families in New York, had commanded a large salary, and was looked upon as a valuable, responsible woman.

But, like too many of her nation, her appetite for strong drink had brought her down, until from the trusted employee of a brown-stone mansion on Fifth avenue she had degenerated down to the keeper of a shanty store on Shanty Hill.

The house she occupied was divided into two apartments.

The front one was used for the store, and in the rear one she lived.

The stock of goods that were displayed behind the counter was extremely limited, and if a searcher after knowledge had interviewed any of the policemen of the neighborhood in regard to the widow's store, the information would have been immediately given that the widow and her grocery were a "fraud," to use the expressive vernacular.

The grocery store was but a blind to cover the sale of liquor, and so save the widow from the expense of taking out a city and Government license as required by law.

Both the excise officials and the revenue gentlemen had made desperate and determined attempts to catch Mrs. Flannigan and so put a stop to her defiance of the laws, but had never yet succeeded in catching the widow tripping, and in three or four instances the attempts had almost cost the officers their lives, for the settlement had risen as one man, and men women and children had made matters so particularly warm for the intruders, that only a hasty flight had enabled them to escape the vengeance of the mob.

It was nearly midnight, and the people of the shanty town had about all retired to rest.

The widow had just seen her last batch of customers to the door, and going outside was closing the shutter that protected her window-glass from any stray stones that drunken youths, bent upon making night hideous might be induced to throw at it when there wasn't anybody around to see who did the damage, when she was suddenly startled by a light footstep close by her elbow and a voice said:

"Isn't this Mrs. O'Flannigan?"

For all her bravery in temporal affairs, the widow was decidedly superstitious.

It was near the midnight hour, the time when churchyards yawn and ghostly figures haunt the glimpses of the moon, and when the keeper of the Irish shebeen, transported bodily to the New World, heard the light footfall right by her side without a previous warning, although she might have known that it wasn't a spirit, for spirits move with noiseless tread, she gave a gasp and involuntarily called upon the saints to protect her from harm.

The voice though, clear, melodious and youthful, immediately reassured her, for the tones were human beyond a doubt.

She turned and beheld a slight girlish figure completely enveloped in a black waterproof cloak which reached from head to heel, and over the face a veil was fastened.

"That's me name, miss, and I'm not afther being ashamed of it, aither."

"Don't you know me—don't you remember me?"

And as the stranger put the question she removed the veil which concealed her face, and revealed the features of the fair girl whom the Lightweight, at the peril of his life, had rescued from the fire, when the old house on Forty-second street was destroyed.

The widow was puzzled.

It seemed to her as if she had seen the face of the girl somewhere, and yet for the life of her she could not remember the circumstances, and she said as much to the questioner.

"Don't you remember Milly Hibbard?" the other asked.

"Milly Hibbard?" repeated the old woman in a tone indicative of a great deal of doubt.

"Yes, Polly Hibbard's daughter!"

"Av coorse, av coorse! The saints be good to me!" exclaimed the widow, her face lighting up.

"Shure! I don't know where me head was that I didn't know ye at furst."

"Oh, it isn't strange; it is nearly ten years since you have seen me, and I was only a little girl then."

"Upon me wourd ye are right, and phat a dale of changes there has been in those ten years," and the widow shook her head, sorrowfully.

"Wait till I fasten this b'aste of a shutter, thin come inside wid me for it's dyin' I am to talk to yees."

The shutter fastened, the old woman conducted the young girl into the house.

She took pains to fasten the door securely behind, for, as she explained to her visitor:

"There's lashin' of thaves around!"

Then she tendered her visitor a chair and inquired:

"Would ye be afther likin' a nice drop of good whisky for to kape ye from takin' cold?"

The girl politely declined the offer on the plea that she never drank any spirits.

"Oh, well, darlint, ye'r' young now and ye don't nade thin," the widow remarked.

"Wait till ye get as old as I am with lashin' of trouble, and worriment of soul and thin ye'll find that there isn't anything that goes straight to the spot and does ye more good than a drop of the r'ale ould stuff."

And then from the hiding-place where she kept her small supply of liquor, a secret closet in the side-wall, she produced a bottle of whisky which she placed upon the table, got herself a cup—this was with deep intent to conceal from the girl how large a quantity of the potent fluid she intended to take—filled out a liberal supply

of the fiery fluid, which was about as cheap an article as the market afforded, and took a good half-cupful down at a swallow without even winking.

"Aha, that's the stuff to warm the cockles of yer heart, me colleen," she remarked.

"And to think that it is ten years and gone since I have set me two eyes on yer face," she continued.

"Oh, hone, oh, hone! and I was a lady in those days wid an illigant place and foine wages, and servants for to wait on me, and now I'm reduced to kape this wee bit of a store, and if it wasn't for the sup of the whisky that I'm afther obligin' me neighbors wid once in a while, shure, I'd be afther starvin', bad 'cess to the dirthy business."

And then in order to soothe the wrath which her reflections had excited in her business she helped herself to another cupful of the whisky.

While the woman was speaking the girl had been glancing around the apartment.

There was a cloud upon her brow, and it was evident that she was ill at ease.

"And how is yer mother—the saints be good to her—she was as foine a woman as iver trod in shoe-leather—she's well and doin' well av coorse? Oh, it's the foine long head that she always had upon her shoulders."

"My mother is dead," the girl replied.

"The saints be good to us, ye don't tell me so! Oho, that's a loss now I tell yer, and I s'pose, darlint, she left ye a nice tidy sum for to get along wid, for it's a savin' woman yer mother was iver since she was a girl."

"We kem over in the same ship, and we lived at the same place for many a year, worse luck that I iver lost it!"

"No, all that my mother left went to her son, my half-brother, Dan, you know."

"Oh, yis, I remimber him, and it was always in trouble he was too, a wild gossoon."

"Shure he'll make ducks and drakes of the money fast enough!"

"Yes, and it is on his account that I came to see you to-night. I have a strange story to tell, and I need a shelter where no one can find me!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A STRANGE STORY.

"YE take me breath away wid astonishment!" the widow exclaimed, and in order to atone for this untoward event she helped herself to another cupful of whisky.

"But whin ye spake of a shelter, shure, I've an illegant wan to offer ye here, and I've a place to hide ye away where the ould devil himself wouldn't be apt to find ye!"

Again the girl's eyes wandered around the apartment, and it was plain that she did not understand where it could be, for the house apparently offered no place of concealment.

The widow noticed the look of the girl and chuckled aloud.

"Aha, I'll go bail that ye don't see any place where ye could hide?"

"Indeed I do not."

"A wee bit of a cat would be bothered to con-s'ale itself!"

"Yes, I should think so."

"Phat kind of a hiding-place would it be afther bein' if ye could see it the first time ye looked at it, answer me that now, me darlint?" exclaimed the old woman, triumphantly.

This was true enough, and the girl was obliged to admit as much.

"Niver ye worry about the hiding-place!" the widow cried, confidently.

"I'll be afther stowing ye away so snugly that all the cops and peelers in New York will not be afther findin' ye, do ye moind that now."

"Go on wid yer story so I kin know phat is the matter. Mebbe I might be able to help ye out although I'm not the woman I used to be, for the wourd has tr'ated me mighty badly for the last tin years."

"My story is a very strange one indeed," the girl began.

"In the first place I am not Polly Hibbard's daughter."

"Aha!" and the old woman nodded her head and smiled sagely.

"That doesn't astonish me in the l'aste," she said.

"I suspicioned that from the furst time I iver saw ye, for there wasn't two looks in yer face like yer mother, and then I niver heard of her gittin' married ag'in afther her old man died."

"I made no bones of telling her so either, but she only laughed and tould me that a good many people in this wourd said a d'ale more than their prayers."

"Oh, she had the long head, and I thought at the time that some one was payin' her a good bit of money for to take care of yees."

"No, you are wrong there," the girl replied.

"It was by pure accident that I came in her way, and she determined to adopt me, thinking that in time she would be able to get a large sum by selling me to some wealthy, childless family."

"So I was sent to a convent school, the lady for whom my supposed mother worked paying all expenses, anxious to help her along."

"When I was twelve years old my mother left service and opened a little store, and I was brought home to attend to it."

"Yis, I heard of that through a cousin of mine who was acquainted wid yer mother, but I niver wint there meself."

"When I was sixteen years old, one year ago, through an accidental chain of circumstances, my mother made a discovery which led her to believe that I was not an orphan as she had always believed, but on the contrary, I was the child of wealthy parents, from whom I had been stolen when scarcely more than an infant."

"Oh, Howly Moses! yer don't m'ane it!" exclaimed the widow, in amazement.

"Yes, and what was more, my family were willing to pay an enormous sum for my restoration."

"Av coorse, av coorse!"

"This matter was kept secret from me, and I knew nothing of it."

"It was my mother's idea to get all the money possible out of the matter, and so she formed a cunning plan."

"By restoring me to my true parents she would undoubtedly secure a large reward, but then that would end the matter, and she was not satisfied to have it arranged in that way."

"She wished to fix it so that there would be a certain sum coming in every year."

"Oh, musha! that would be a foine idea!" Mrs. O'Flannigan exclaimed, quick to perceive the merits of this plan.

"I think the scheme was arranged by a lawyer whom she consulted in regard to the affair, and this was how they planned:

"After negotiations for my return to my parents were opened, and all the details arranged, then I was to be secretly married to Dan Hibbard."

"I was to be delivered to my parents, without letting them know of this union, and of course I was not to know anything of my parents until the moment came when I was to be delivered to them."

"When the marriage was proposed to me, I declared I would never consent to it."

"They tried to persuade me, but I was firm and would not listen to them. Of course I had no idea why they were so anxious for the marriage to take place."

"Mrs. Hibbard pretended that it was because she was sick and did not think she would live very long, and she was anxious to have me settled in life before she died."

"Yes, yes, that was a n'ate way of putting it," the widow remarked.

"And as for Dan, he declared that I was the only girl in the world who would suit him for a wife."

"He's a foine b'aste to be afther talkin' that way!" Mrs. O'Flannigan exclaimed.

"The murtherin' blaggard! Shure he's been in jail half the time iver since he was fifteen years ould."

"I persistently refused, and then Mrs. Hibbard became angry and declared that, as she was my legal guardian, she would force me to marry her son whether I was willing or not."

"She said she had taken a lawyer's advice and he had advised such a step."

"Oh, these brute b'astes of lawyers will do anything!"

"The very next day Mrs. Hibbard was taken violently ill with a raging fever, and then, as if Heaven itself was determined to punish my persecutors, Dan became involved in a quarrel in some low drinking-place up-town, there was a desperate affray, some of the young men were hurt, and Dan was arrested and charged with the crime, and sent to Sing Sing for three years."

"Served him right, the blagg'ard," commented the widow. "He was a bad egg if iver there was wan!"

"Almost the entire charge of the sick woman came upon me, and in her delirium she raved and revealed to me the full extent of the plot of which I was to be the victim."

"Three days she struggled with the fever and then death claimed its victim."

"During her ravings she said repeatedly that the papers which gave a complete account of the manner in which I was stolen from my parents, and which would easily enable me to prove my identity were in a certain closet in an old house in Forty-second street, but it was not until recently that I was enabled to discover which house it was."

"Thim papers would be mighty valuable, do ye mind?"

"So I thought, and procuring a bunch of keys I entered the house, which was unoccupied, and searched for them, but without success, and while I was occupied in the search, the house took fire and burned to the ground."

"Oho, that was a bad stroke!"

"No, I think not; for I have been thinking over the matter lately, and I have come to the conclusion that no such papers existed except in the imagination of the sick woman."

"I see, I see."

"Because if there had been any such important papers in existence, they most surely would have been secured by Mrs. Hibbard the moment she learned of them."

"True for yees—that's so! Divil a doubt of that, at all, at all!"

"And now the task for me is to discover where my parents are, for in regard to them I have not a single clew."

"Do you know the name of the lawyer, me darlint?"

"No, they were careful to keep his identity a secret from me."

"Upon me wourd, it seems to me as if ye have a mighty hard task before ye, but I will be afther doing all I can for ye."

The girl thanked the old woman for her kindness, and then said:

"For the present I have been obliged to seek concealment, for Dan has returned from Sing Sing, having been pardoned by the aid of some of his political associates, and although I had sought to hide away from him in obscure quarters, yet he managed to discover me. I had a visit from him to-night."

"He said that by the death of my mother he had become my legal guardian, and that the law gave him power to control my actions, as I am not yet of age."

"I pretended to be greatly frightened, and said I would rather do anything than be dragged into a police court, so he told me he would make arrangements to have me live with some friends of his and would come for me in the morning, but the moment he was fairly out of the way I put on my things and fled."

"I did not know what to do or where to go, for I hav'n't much money, until I happened to think of you up in this lonely quarter, and I thought that if I were to search all New York over I could not find a safer hiding-place."

"Right ye are, darlint, and I'll be after taking good care of yees, and I'll put ye in a place where all the detectives in the world won't find ye!" And as she spoke the old woman rose to her feet with a mysterious air.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PLOTTERS.

SHE went to the door and listened as if she was alarmed lest some skulking spy was playing the eavesdropper, then she signed to the girl to pay particular attention, and went to where an old mat was stretched in front of the bed.

The mat was tacked to the floor, but grasping one end of the mat in her hand she gave it a tug and up came a trap-door, revealing a cavity beneath down which a flight of rickety steps led.

The mat was so arranged that it concealed the edges of the trap-door.

This was the store-house where the widow kept her limited supply of liquors safe from the searches of the officers.

"Here's a foine bedroom built out of the solid rock!" the old woman exclaimed, as she lit a lantern and began to descend.

At some remote period before Shantytown had a local habitation and a name some one in want of stone had quarried into the rocks, making an excavation about twelve feet square, and the original builder of the shanty had resolved to utilize the cavity for a cellar, so had filled up with dirt the entrance to the excavation where the stone had been hauled out and had constructed his house over the pit.

When the widow came in possession of the house the trap-door in the floor had excited her curiosity, and she had been moved to examine it, and the moment she discovered what kind of a place it was the idea had come to her that her fortune would be made if she opened an illicit liquor store, for here was a place where she could stow her stock without danger of detection.

The scheme had been carried out, and if the shop had not prospered as well as it ought to have done, it was through no fault of the business, but because the hostess was her own best customer.

The girl followed the widow down the stairs. There was a small cot bed in the cellar and a dry-goods box which evidently served for a table.

"Oh, it is an illigant bedroom I'm after telling ye!" the widow exclaimed, as she stood in the center of the apartment and swung her lantern around so that the girl might examine the place.

"Whin the hot nights do be afther coming on it's down here I lie for the sake of the coolness."

"There's a blanket in the box if ye want it, but ye needn't be afeard of the dampness, for though it do be cool sometimes, yet 'tis dry as a bone."

"I shall be safe here at all events," the girl remarked.

"Sorra a taste of a lie in that!" Mrs. O'Flannigan observed.

"No wan will be afther findin' ye here. Ye could stay up-stairs and welkim, but then the customers do be runnin' in, and thin there's an ould man who slapes in the store, so as to make shure that I am not robbed in the night."

"He's a foine old man, as foine as you'll find in a day's journey. Tom O'Hare, from the same town as meself in Oireland, and I've known him iver since we were childer playing in the bogs together, but then Tom takes a wee drop too

much sometimes, and whin the whisky is in the wit is out, you know, and he might let out that ye was here widout m'anin' for to do any harum, ye know, if he knew ye was to the fore."

"Oh, it will be better not to let him know; I will be able to get along here very well, for it will only be for a little while," the girl remarked.

"I do not doubt that Dan will do his best to discover me, but he will not keep up the chase long when he finds that I have not left any clew to my whereabouts."

"True for yees! And the chances are big, me darlint, that whin he finds that ye are gone he will go on a tear, and whin he does that he gits ugly the moment the liquor is in him, and he's the b'ye to use the knife widout carin' whether he cuts friend or foe."

"I tell you phat it is, me jewel, I will put some of the b'yes up to kape an eye on him so that we will be able to know phat he's doing, and the moment the cops lay him by the heels thin ye can come out."

"I shall be very much obliged, and one of these days I will try to reward you for your kindness!" the girl exclaimed, gratefully.

"Don't mintion it!" the widow replied, immediately.

"Shure I always liked ye since ye was a wee bit of a thing, and bad 'cess to me if I don't do all I can for yees."

"I'll l'ave the lantern, and whin the morning comes I'll be afther hopping down to see ye once in a while."

"Don't be afeard; there's nothin' here that will harm; divil a hair of a rat or a mouse have I seen since I've lived in the house."

"I've two foine cats, and they come in here through the weeny holes under the house, and it would be as much as a rat's life would be worth for to dare to show his nose in here."

"Oh, I am not afraid!" protested the girl, and then the widow retreated up the steps leaving the fugitive to her solitary meditations.

Mrs. O'Flannigan carefully shut down the trap-door, chuckling all the while to herself in a manner that was expressive of the highest degree of satisfaction.

"Upon me wourd this is the greatest piece of luck that iver happened to the likes of me!" she exclaimed, as she seated herself by the table and helped herself to another cupful of whisky.

"Won't the ould man be astonished whin I tell him of this bag of gould that has been flung at us."

"Tare and ounds! we're made for life, that we are!"

And she was just about to help herself to another horn of whisky when there came a rap at the door.

"That's me ould man, I know his fist," she muttered.

Then she rose and hastened to the door. Mrs. O'Flannigan was called the Widow Flannigan by everybody.

Her husband had been killed during the War of the Rebellion, and she drew a pension as some slight consolation for her loss, and as that pension would cease if she married again no one had ever succeeded in persuading her to take a second husband, so it was supposed.

Quite a number of the middle-aged unmarried men of the settlement had tried their luck with the widow, all of them, without a single exception, much more in love with the widow's groggery and the snug sum which she was supposed to have in the bank than with herself, but the widow turned a deaf ear to all overtures until Tom O'Hare happened to come along.

As a girl he had been her first love, and now, in middle age, after the lapse of years, the flame still burnt brightly, and so off they went and got secretly married, the widow being determined to hold on to the pension as long as possible.

O'Hare was as great a contrast to the widow as could well be imagined, being a sparsely-built, dried-up sort of a man with a solemn-looking face.

He was a mason by trade, but since he had been taken to the bosom of the amazon he didn't do much work, but had turned his attention to politics with the ambitious hope of being able to secure some office where the pay was good and the work small.

Pursuing this visionary hope was what had detained him; he had been talking the matter over with the "b'yes" at the various saloons in the neighborhood.

"They do be afther tellin' me that I'll have a fat thing before the snow flies, Mrs. O'Flannigan, do ye mind that?" he exclaimed, upon entering.

"Oh, bother yer lies!" she retorted, impatiently. "It is the same ghost story that you have been after tellin' me ever since I knew ye."

"Bother yer fat jobs and yer snow-flies! It's tumbled into a gould mine I have!"

The man looked bewildered, but the woman hastened to seat him at a table, poured out a draught of whisky for him, and then, after cautioning him to speak low, proceeded to relate what had taken place that evening.

She rehearsed in full the story that the fugitive had told her, and then wound up by triumphantly asking him what he thought of it.

"It's a foine tale, but where does the gould-mine come in?" he asked.

"Don't ye see, ye blockhead?" she exclaimed. "We'll be afther playin' the same game that Polly Hibbard intinded to play, except that we won't be afther tryin' to marry the girl to anybody."

"We find her daddy for her and we'll make the ould buck come down wid the money afore he gets the girl."

"We'll be doin' well by her, do ye mind, and making a fortune for ourselves at the same time."

"But how can ye be afther finding her daddy?"

"Can't we get at the lawyer?"

"But ye don't know him."

"Indade and I do. I'll go bail that it is the same man that she always had to get Dan out of his scrapes."

"He's a foxy-headed blaggard who had his office down by the Tombs, Jeff Wimple, they do be afther callin' him."

"Ah, yis, that's r'asonable."

"I'll go down and see him to-morrow and have a talk about the matter."

"I tell ye, Tom O'Hare, it is a gould mine that walked into our dure whin I opened it for that gurl."

"Danny will be afther murtherin' ye."

"The blaggard, if I once get me two hands on him I'd save the hangman a job!" she declared.

The girl below little dreamed of what was going on above her head.

CHAPTER XXI.

A NEW YORK LAWYER.

MRS. O'FLANNIGAN had a great deal of "go-aheadativeness," for one of her race, for the women of the south of Ireland are rather inclined to be sluggish both mentally and physically, but the big Irishwoman was an exception to the rule, and when morning came she was as good as her word, and about eight o'clock started down-town to interview the lawyer.

She did not know the exact location of the gentleman's office, except that it was in the neighborhood of the gloomy pile, modeled after an Egyptian temple, the City Prison, which is popularly known as the Tombs.

The lawyer of whom she was in search, Jefferson Wimple, was about as well-known as any legal gentleman in the city, although he wasn't anything but a third-rate criminal lawyer.

But he was a man who believed in getting his name in the newspapers, and in the case of any atrocious crime he was always ready to appear for the criminal, whether there was any prospect of his getting any money out of the case or not.

The idea of this was to keep his name before the people and so lead the common vulgar herd to believe that he was a great man in his special field.

It was good policy, for the moment some petty rascal got into the stern clutches of the law, his friends hastened to employ Jeff Wimple to defend him.

And was it the lawyer's first endeavor when a case was put into his hands, to find out whether the accused had a really good defense?

Nothing of the kind!

With the eye of a hawk he endeavored to discover some error in the papers, some loop-hole in the law under which the case of his client came, through which an escape might be effected.

In person the lawyer was a medium-sized man with a round, smoothly-shaven face, rather florid complexion, projecting eyes, and he wore his light-brown hair long, and combed back of his ears so as to give him a ministerial look, and in general he had a very theatrical way with him.

The widow did not have the least difficulty in finding the lawyer's office, for it was within a musket-shot of the City Prison, and the first lawyer of whom she inquired directed her to it.

The lawyer was seated in his private office smoking a cigar and examining his mail when Mrs. O'Flannigan was ushered in by the imp-like lad who acted as the lawyer's office boy.

Lawyer Wimple was not in a good humor for the last letter he had examined was a special one sent by a messenger from the hopeful Daniel Hibbard which announced in terse phraseology that the gal, to wit, Milly Hibbard, had cut and run, and the writer couldn't find hide nor hair of her, and in his opinion the "hull thing was N. G.," and he guessed he wouldn't bother himself about the trick "enny more."

"There's an ungrateful hound!" grumbled the lawyer, as in a rage he crumpled the letter up in his hand and cast it upon the table.

"The scoundrel has managed to draw twenty-five dollars out of me, a dollar or two at a time, under pretense of putting the job through, and now at the first sign of difficulty he coolly proposes to throw the whole thing up and let the game go."

"Well, the only thing to be done in the premises is to work the trick without him."

"I will put the detectives on the track and hunt the girl up; she cannot be far off, but this scoundrel is too lazy to bother his head about her—too lazy to find out whither she has fled."

"I'll get even with him though; the first time he gets into trouble and calls upon me to help him out, I will advise him to plead guilty, give him a ghost story about how my influence with the judge will get him off with a light sentence, and then let the old man sock it to him to the full extent of the law, as he will be pretty apt to do."

"I wanted him to marry the girl so that I would be able to draw a regular yearly income out of the thing, for of course I intended to arrange it so that I would have the handling of all the money, but as that can't be worked I will content myself with getting as big a stake out of the family as I can."

The lawyer had arrived at this point when the entrance of the old woman interrupted his meditations.

He cast a rapid glance at her and immediately set her down as a probable client, for she was a representative of the people by whom he was chiefly supported.

"Good-morning, madam, what can I do for you this morning?" he asked, in the beaming, theatrical way in which he always greeted a client upon whom he wished to make an impression.

"Well, sur, I am afther coming to see you upon some important business. Me name is O'Flannigan, Mrs. O'Flannigan, and I am from up Harlem way."

"Ah, yes, glad to see ye, madam," and the lawyer rubbed his hands together, by which he meant to express decided satisfaction.

"I have a great many friends up your way."

"Yis, sor, I suppose, sor, ye do be afther remimberin' Polly Hibbard that's dead and gone?"

An odd expression passed across the lawyer's face; it seemed strange to him that the name of the mother should happen to be brought up just at this time when he was planning to take vengeance upon the son.

"Oh, yes, I knew Mrs. Hibbard very well. I have attended to a great deal of business for her."

"I know, sor, on account of that thafe of the wourld, her son," the widow remarked.

"Oh, it is a dirthy blaggard he is! Faix! if he don't come to be hanged it will be bekase he has some gintleman like yourself for to git him off."

"Well, sometimes I manage to get him off and sometimes I don't. I was not very lucky the last time; but the fellow is an ignorant brute and will not listen to reason, and with a man of that sort it is hard work to do anything."

"True for you, sor, be the howly smoke ye niver said a truer wourd in your life!" the old woman declared.

"Polly Hibbard was as good a friend as I had in the wourld; we kem to this country in the same ship, and we lived in the same family for months, but for all that, many is the time I've said to her: 'Polly, acushla, that Danny of yours will come to be hanged if he doesn't mend his ways, and it's a great shame, so it is, for yees to be thinkin' of making a match between sich a spalpeen as that and such a jewel of a girl as Milly.'"

This took the lawyer so completely by surprise, being so unexpected, that he fairly started and shot a quick glance at the woman.

He had been particularly careful to caution the mother not to whisper a word to any one about the plan to wed the son to the foundling girl, and yet here was this stranger speaking of it as carelessly as though it had been the common topic of conversation in the neighborhood.

Then an explanation of the mystery flashed suddenly across the brain of the lawyer.

"That infernal scoundrel of a Danny must have been blabbing!" he muttered between his teeth.

"Av course I understood that there was strong r'asons for the match," she continued, to the complete amazement of the lawyer, who laid back in his chair and listened in astonishment.

"You see, sor, Polly and meself talked the matter over many a time afore she died."

"It's Lawyer Wimple's idee," she sed to me, sed she. 'Bad 'cess to Lawyer Wimple!' I used to say, sed I—m'anin' no offense to a gintleman like yer honor at all, but 'twas jist my way of sp'akin'."

"But, Biddy, ye Greek," she'd say to me, 'just think of the money a-comin' in steady every year if we fix up a match betwene the two, as the lawyer wants.'"

"To the divil I'd pitch the money!" I used for to say."

"I'd be contint for to take the wan big sum in a lump and I've the other go," sed I."

The legal gentleman could contain himself no longer.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed, angrily, "what the deuce do you mean by this disjointed tale? Have you taken leave of your senses, woman?"

The lawyer was in a quandary; he knew not what to make of this strange affair; it did not

seem possible that the dead woman could have been stupid enough to discuss the carefully-arranged plot in all its details with this loud-mouthed creature, who, the experienced eyes of the lawyer instantly detected, was a slave to strong drink.

Yet if she had not revealed the matter how on earth did the woman come in possession of the knowledge she possessed?

"No, av course not; shure ye needn't try to make out that ye don't know all about it, whin ye'r' the fore front of the hull thing."

"What business is it of yours, anyhow?" cried Wimple, angrily.

"The gurl is gone, isn't she?"

"Aha, you know that, eh?"

"I do indade, and do yees want to find her?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, that's more than Danny can do!" announced the widow with an air of triumph.

"Perhaps you can find her though," the lawyer suggested, beginning to get an idea of what the woman was after.

"Perhaps I can," she responded with dignity.

"Will you?"

"Upon me wourd I don't know; will ye be afther letting me in for a share in the money that you are going to make?"

"Oho, that is your game, eh?"

"I want my whack as well as the rest!"

CHAPTER XXII.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

THE lawyer leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily.

Now that he understood exactly what game the woman was trying to play the whole thing appeared to him to be supremely ridiculous.

The idea that this low piece of humanity should attempt to measure wits with a man like himself, was perfectly absurd.

"Yis, yis, yer honor, I am as anxious to turn an honest penny as any wan that ye can find, and since Polly is dead and can't have her share, I don't see why it shouldn't be afther comin' to me."

"Polly was the supposed mother of the girl, brought her up, you know, and paid out a great deal of her hard-earned money for her from first to last, you know."

"Faix! she was afther making the gurl wourk like a naygur the moment she got big enough," the widow answered, contemptuously.

"I suppose you know the girl is with Danny?" the lawyer observed, closely watching the face of the old woman as he spoke.

"If she is thin ye know more about the matter than I do, and I'll go bail that ye don't," Mrs. O'Flannigan replied, shrewdly.

"Oh, she has left Danny then?"

"If yer honor says so, shure it must be so," the widow replied.

"Oh, come, don't let us beat about the bush any more!" the lawyer exclaimed, impatiently. "If you know where the girl is, say so and have done with it."

"I can find her, yer honor, I am sure of that, and so the quicker yees are afther puttin' yerself into communication wid the old gintleman, her father, so as to find out how much he will be willin' to give to have the gurl brought back to him again, the better."

"I think I can attend to that matter without being obliged to call upon anybody for advice," Wimple replied, shortly.

The lawyer did not like the haste with which the old woman was proceeding, and thought it advisable to apply a check.

"The saints forbid that I should be afther attempting to tell a gintleman like yourself how to do the trick; all I thought was that the quicker we got the money into our hands the better," and Mrs. O'Flannigan winked knowingly at the lawyer.

"How much do you suppose the father will be willing to pay?"

"A mighty big sum if he is as rich as I am tould he is," the widow answered without a moment's hesitation.

"Well, I am really at a loss to understand who could have told you anything about the father; how do you know he is a wealthy man?"

"Oho, the birds in the air whispered the news in my ears as they flew by," the woman replied, with true Irish wit.

"What sum of money do you think can be got out of this affair?"

"If ye wourk it well it ought to be about twenty thousand dollars."

"Well, your ideas are anything but modest!" the lawyer exclaimed after a prolonged whistle of astonishment.

"That's a small sum for a gurl like this wan."

"And how much of that sum do you expect?"

"Tin thousand, yer honor, will contint me," the widow replied, her eyes sparkling as though she already beheld the money within her grasp.

"Ten thousand!" cried Wimple, in amazement.

"Oh, yis, yer honor, I'll be contint with that, and I'll not ask a penny more."

"No, no, that won't be right; you are too modest in your demands altogether; why don't you take the whole twenty thousand?" the lawyer asked, sarcastically.

"Shure, I want to be afther giving you a chance to live as well as myself," she replied, grinning in the face of the now thoroughly enraged lawyer.

"I am very much obliged to you for your kind consideration, but don't you let your thoughts of clutching this ten thousand dollars keep sleep from your pillow, for you'll never get it."

"You bring the girl to me and I will give you fifty dollars, and that is all you will get out of the trick."

Mrs. O'Flannigan rose in wrath.

"Fifty dollars!" she cried, in supreme contempt, "to the divil I'll pitch yer fifty dollars. I'm going to have half of all ye get, put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"Oh, if you don't want the money, I can find the girl without your aid; the police will do the job for me."

"Divil burn yer cops!" cried the widow, loftily.

"Not all the cops and peelers in the town will be able to find the gurl; but I'll be afther findin' her father widout you, just you mind that now, and sorra a cint out of the affair will ye git!"

"You produce that girl within four and twenty hours or I'll make it warm for you!" Wimple threatened.

"Oho, go talk to the ducks wid yer boo, boo! I wasn't born yesterday, yer blaggard!"

And then the widow retreated, boiling over with anger and leaving the lawyer in a like condition.

"Ten thousand dollars! the ignorant beast!" exclaimed the lawyer, as he watched the indignant woman sail frigate-like down the street.

"And she talked of the money as coolly as though ten thousand dollars was a trifle that could be picked up on the street at almost any time."

And then a bright idea occurred to the legal luminary.

Why not follow the woman and track her to her home?

Such a course would surely lead to the discovery of the missing girl, for, of course, there wasn't much doubt that she was under the woman's care.

"By Jove! I'll do it!" he exclaimed, as he sprang nimbly to his feet and seized his hat.

"I'll do a little detective business myself and so save a big bill of expense."

"I haven't anything important on hand this morning, and I might as well attend to the business myself as to delegate the matter to some one else."

"If I attend to the work myself, I will be sure that it will be well done."

"And then, too, what a satisfaction it will be to take this ignorant beast by surprise and show her that she isn't half so smart as she thinks she is!"

By the time that Wimple had finished these reflections and got into the street Mrs. Flannigan was about half a block away.

That a watch might be set upon her and her footsteps dogged was something that never occurred to her, and so she never took the trouble to turn her head to look behind her.

In fact, so enraged was she at the contemptuous treatment which she had received that all she thought of was how to be avenged upon the lawyer for his shabby treatment.

"Aha, the murtherin' thafe of a lawyer!" she exclaimed as she strode along.

"I'll go bail that I will make him sore and sorry before he is a week older."

"Fifty dollars is it?"

"Oh, mother of Moses! did any one iver hear the likes of that? I am to get fifty dollars—me that's got the gurl, and he's to have twenty thousand mebbe, jist for sittin' up in his foine office, and lookin' wise and grand."

"But ye won't get it, me foine ladda-buck! Jist put that in yer pipe and smoke it."

"It is meself, the widdy, Biddy O'Flannigan, that's afther tellin' ye so."

"The father is in the city here somewhere, and why can't I be afther findin' him as well as this thief of a lawyer?"

"Shure, and I can, and phat is more I will too."

"It is about sixteen years ago since the gurl was stolen from her home. How aisy it will be for to put an advertisement in the newspapers statin' all the facts in the case—that the baby looked like, and how she can be found now by addressing a certain place."

"I can fix it so that no man will know who puts the thing in the newspaper, for I can arrange it so that all the business can be done by letter."

"And how mad this blaggard of a lawyer will be whin he wakes up some foine morning and finds that Mrs. Biddy O'Flannigan has found the father and collared all the cash, and bad 'cess to me for a blunderin' ape if that isn't exactly phat I will be afther doin'. The dirty blaggard! I'll t'ache him to talk to me wid his m'ane fifty dollars whin it's tin thousand that I am afther wantin'!"

And so muttering to herself after this fashion, nursing her wrath to keep it warm, as the saying is, she went on without even taking the trouble to turn her head to look behind her.

Even if she had had a suspicion that she was being followed and had endeavored to discover whether it was so or not, it is a question whether she would have succeeded in discovering the lawyer, for that shrewd worthy, displaying excellent detective skill in this instance had crossed to the other side of the street and was keeping at a safe distance in the rear.

The portly form of the woman, amply displayed by the gaudy-hued shawl she wore, was visible fully a block away, and it was an easy job to keep her in sight, and yet remain at such a distance in the rear as to render detection difficult.

Mrs. O'Flannigan proceeded straight to the nearest west-side L road station and ascended the stairs.

The lawyer quickened his pace and was at the foot of the stairs when she passed into the elevated depot.

CHAPTER XXIII. SHADOWED.

THIS was the critical point of the chase, and Wimple understood that it was so.

Since the establishment of the Elevated roads, the railroad on stilts in the air, it has been a favorite dodge of the metropolitan rascals when they fancied that they were going through the process which is known as being "shadowed" to take to the L roads with the idea of throwing the trackers from the trail.

When a man ascends the steps and enters the station it is an easy matter for him to ascertain whether there is any suspicious person in his rear or not.

If there is some one who appears to be watching him, it is an easy matter for the fugitive to remain on the platform when the train arrives, and allow that particular one to go by him.

All the passengers engaged in legitimate business as a matter of course will board the train and go on, and if a single person remains behind it is a pretty good proof that the party is playing the spy—"piping," to use the argot of the detectives.

Then when the fugitive ascertains this fact, all he has to do is to keep quiet, remain indifferent, and act as if he had not noticed the circumstance.

Then when the next train arrives, saunter down to the end of the station, lean up against the railway as though it was not the intention to board the train, and then at the last moment, just as the gates are being closed, make a rush and get on board.

In about nine cases out of ten the spy, not anticipating this movement, will be left behind, and even if he is on the watch for just such a thing, the second's start that the fugitive has will enable him to get on board and prevent the spy from executing the same maneuver.

The criminal lawyer, of course, from the nature of his business, was perfectly familiar with all this sort of thing, and when the woman ascended the stairs and disappeared in the station, he had a suspicion that she was about to try that piece of fancy work which among the crooks and the detectives is known as the "elevated throw."

So, in order to defeat the move, if possible, he ascended the stairs, but did not enter the station until just as the train drew up, which, as it happened, was only a few seconds after Mrs. O'Flannigan gained the platform.

The woman got on board of the train, never taking the trouble to look to the right or left.

Wimple, perceiving this fact, immediately purchased his ticket, and hastening on to the platform succeeded in getting on the train just as it was about to move off, securing a seat in the car just behind the one which the woman entered.

From the position which he had chosen it was an easy matter for the lawyer to keep his eyes upon the woman and yet escape her observation.

If she made a movement to rise with the intention of leaving the car, he could not fail to notice the fact.

And during all the time occupied by the long ride up-town, the lawyer mentally chuckled at the shrewdness which he had displayed.

"Inside of an hour, my lady," he muttered, "I guess you will change your mind in regard to your ability to outwit a gentleman about my size," he murmured, with the utmost complacency.

At the up-town station nearest to the classic precincts of Shantytown, Mrs. O'Flannigan quit the train.

Wimple was on the watch for the movement and followed at a safe distance in the rear, and succeeded without any difficulty in tracking her to the shanty which displayed upon its outward walls the intelligence that it was Mrs. O'Flannigan's grocery store.

Wimple, from a convenient observation-point, watched the woman disappear within the building, and then he rubbed his hands gleefully together.

"Well, well, if I haven't got this thing dead to rights you can call me a Dutchman!" he exclaimed.

"The girl is concealed there, of course; a capital good hiding-place, too, for it would be a shrewd detective indeed who would think of looking for her in such a hole as this unless he had a pointer to guide him.

"Now all I've got to do is to storm the fortress and carry off the prize."

Just at this point a policeman came sauntering along.

As it luckily happened, the lawyer was acquainted with the officer.

He had formerly been in the precinct in which Wimple's office was situated, but for some neglect of duty had been banished to the dreary up-town district.

"Hallo, Mike, is that you?" Wimple exclaimed.

The lawyer always made it a point to be on friendly terms with court officials, policemen and the like, for their recommendations often brought him fat fees.

"Aha! is it there ye are, lawyer?" cried the officer, who was a son of the Emerald Isle. "Phat are ye afther doin' up in this quarter?"

"On business, of course."

"Say, do you know the woman O'Flannigan, who keeps the little store yonder?"

The officer did know her, and no good of her either, he added.

Since his advent in the up-town district the banished man had endeavored to get into the good graces of the widow, with the idea of securing free whisky even if he was not successful in the greater task of inducing the widow to espouse him, but she "wouldn't have it."

"She has a young girl concealed in her house that I am afther, and I want your aid to get her out."

The officer looked a little dubious; he was a new man in the district, but the reputation of Shantytown had become known to him.

"Phat has she done, lawyer, and have yez a warrant for her?"

"Oh, no; none is needed. She hasn't committed any crime; she is simply a young girl under age who has cut and run from her home and found shelter with the widow."

"Her brother is her legal guardian and I am his lawyer."

"Of course it is my duty to take her out of this place so as to remove from her all evil influence."

And the lawyer winked at the policeman. The officer returned the wink and shook his head knowingly.

"Do you think she will come widout any trouble, or will she be apt to kick up a fuss?"

"Oh, the girl, I guess, will not make any trouble, although it is probable that the old woman may be inclined to cut up rusty."

"This is a mighty hard place, lawyer, and if yez will be afther taking my advice yez will go to the station and git the sergeant to back yez up wid a squad of min."

"Oh, that won't be necessary," replied the lawyer.

"You just come along with me and I will talk to the old woman in such a way that she will not dare to dream of resisting the majesty of the law," he asserted confidently.

The policeman shook his head.

He did not feel so sanguine about the matter.

"It's mighty little that these b'astes among the rocks care for the law," he remarked. "If it was night-time I know ye couldn't take the gurl unless the old b'aste was willin', but in the daylight mebbe the hounds won't dare to show their teeth."

"Oh, I don't think we will have any trouble. Some of the fellows must know me, and if they do they are aware that I am not a man who stands any nonsense," the lawyer exclaimed, loftily.

"Begob! some of these half-grown b'yes up here wouldn't think anything of makin' snoots at the superintendent himself!" the officer declared.

And then, happening to catch a glimpse of a knot of the inhabitants who had collected by the side of one of the distant shanties attracted by the fact that there was a stranger in conversation with the officer, the metropolitan called the attention of the other to the group.

"There's some of der gang now," he said, "Bad 'cess to the brutes, they like no better fun than murderin' a cop wid a rock whiniver they git the chance."

"Oh, there isn't any doubt that they are a tough crowd," the lawyer observed. "But come on and let us interview the widow."

Wimple marched boldly up to the shanty and entered it followed by the policeman.

Mrs. O'Flannigan was in the outer apartment busily engaged in relating to the "ould man" the particulars of her unsatisfactory interview with the lawyer when the pair entered, and so eager had she been to relate the story that she had merely laid aside her bonnet and shawl.

The entrance of the two took her completely by surprise, and she jumped to her feet, red with rage at the intrusion.

"There he is now, the dirty thafe of the world!" she yelled, shaking her clinched fist at the lawyer.

"You didn't expect to see me so soon again I

presume," Wimple remarked, smiling blandly, and with his eyes roving curiously over the room in search of something that might denote the presence of the girl.

He saw immediately that there was an inner apartment, and took it for granted that the girl was concealed therein.

"Bad 'cess to yees, I hoped niver to have looked upon yer ugly face ag'in!" she cried. "Phat do yees want here wid yer dirty cop at yer back?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RISING OF SHANTYTOWN.

"COME, come, no bad language, you know," the lawyer expostulated.

"It wouldn't do you the least bit of good, and you had better by far keep a civil tongue in your head."

"I'll be afther givin' ye a copper for yer good advice, for it's worth no more," and the widow made a low courtesy in mocking politeness.

"You see I am not a kind of man who stands any nonsense, and I am right afther you as sharp as a razor."

"Where's the girl—in yonder?" and as he put the question, Wimple made a movement as if to enter the inner room, but the widow immediately threw herself before the door.

"Stand back out of that!" she yelled at the top of her voice.

"Don't ye dare to be afther intrudin' into me private apartments! Phat do yees m'ane by sich conducts, ye scut of the world!"

"We want the girl that you have concealed in that room, and you had better give her up if you don't want to get into trouble!" cried the lawyer, sternly, having made up his mind to carry the matter with a high hand.

"Ye lie, ye blagg'ard! there's no gurl there!" yelled the woman at the top of her lungs.

"We will believe that afther we have searched the room but not before!" Wimple retorted.

"S'arch me apartment!" screamed the woman. "I'll be afther breakin' the fore-front of yer nose if ye try it."

"Have ye a warrant for yer dirty business?"

"No warrant is necessary, Widdy O'Flannigan," spoke the officer sharply at this point.

The metropolitan was beginning to get anxious in regard to the crowd without, who were increasing in numbers each moment, for the widow's shrill voice, ringing through the open doorway, had alarmed the settlement, and like a hive of bees, the inhabitants of Shantytown all rallied immediately upon the slightest warning that danger threatened.

It was an angry-looking crowd, and the officer's uneasiness increased, too, when he noticed that the majority of the crowd had armed themselves with the first missile that had come handy, from rotten tomatoes, ancient eggs, and decayed potatoes, down to the loose stones lying so convenient to hand.

"No warrant!" screamed the woman.

"If yees was the mayor of the city, or the President of the United States, ye couldn't s'arch me apartment without a warrant!"

And the crowd without joined in, in loud and angry hoots, at this bold declaration.

"I'm a decent, honest woman, and I want ye two blagg'ards to git out afore I lose me temper and forgit that I'm a real leddy born and bred!"

And the widow shook a muscular fist, big enough to do credit to any butcher, under the nose of the lawyer.

Again the crowd hooted, and some urchin on the outskirts of the gang let fly a decayed tomato that, striking the doorpost, was shattered into bits, the particles flying over the officer, much to his disgust.

The rage of the policeman was intense; new uniforms cost money; they did not grow on every bush.

"Ye murderin' blagg'ard!" he cried, hoarse with passion, "if I knew who threw that tomatoes I'd break yer head with me club!"

And then came a volume of insulting cries from the members of the crowd, the yellers being on the outskirts of the group concealed behind the rest.

"Get onto the dandy cop!"

"Take a tumble to yourself, Moriarty!"

"Look at the snoozer wid der club!"

"Oh, hire a hall!"

The policeman was red with rage, and in order to awe the crowd he advanced through the doorway with upright baton.

The gang gave way before him, but only got out of his immediate reach and renewed their taunting cries.

"An' now that yer peeler has gone, s'pose you git out, too!" cried the widow, when the policeman went to disperse the mob.

"Yer room is a d'ale sight better than yer company!"

"I won't stir a step without the girl, you vile old harridan!" cried Wimple, losing his temper at finding himself so firmly confronted.

"Yer blagg'ard—whoop!" and with a wild Irish yell, the woman, infuriated at the name bestowed upon her—which to her mind represented something awful, for it was one she had

never heard before—sprung forward and before the man had a chance to defend himself, planted a heavy blow full in his chest which sent him spinning through the door, and if it had not been for coming in contact with the form of the burly policeman he would have fallen.

The officer turned immediately and grabbed him so as to prevent the lawyer from falling.

And the moment the policeman turned his back was the signal for the missiles to begin to fly.

Every one in the crowd, men, women and children, seemed to have their hands full of things to throw.

And it was a perfect shower of old eggs, potatoes, tomatoes, tin can, decayed cabbages, and, in fact, all kinds of rotten vegetables, and last, though not least, stones from the size of a pebble to rocks, half as big as a man's head.

The volley only lasted for half a minute—just the time it took the policeman to enable the lawyer to regain his feet, and then when the two men faced around and drew their revolvers the crowd scampered away, but the missiles were still thrown from behind the shelter afforded by the rocks and from around the corner of the shanties.

Two more demoralized-looking men than Wimple and the policeman as they faced the gang were never seen in Shantyville.

Their clothing was ruined, being spattered over with all kinds of filth, their hats had been broken by the heavy stones which had fallen upon them, and their faces were cut and bleeding from the damage inflicted by the stones.

Both of them were desperate under the treatment which they had received and were quite ready to use their weapons, but now that they faced around the gang had disappeared, although the flight of stones still continued accompanied by angry cries of:

"Kill the cop!"

"Murder the bloody spy!"

And similar "pleasant" suggestions.

It had been the idea of the assailed men that the display of their weapons would put their tormentors to flight, but it was soon apparent to them that though this had been accomplished, yet from their "intrenchments" behind the rocks and shanties the mob still kept up the attack, and it would not be possible for them to compel the gang to stop, for they were surrounded on all sides, and it would not be possible for the two to attack their foes in a half-dozen different quarters at the same time.

"We'll have to get out of this!" cried the officer, in the ear of the lawyer, as they "put in their time" in dodging the stones and flourished their cocked revolvers endeavoring to get a chance to fire at their assailants, and so enraged were the two by the vile treatment which they had received that they would not have hesitated a moment in shooting any of the gang if they could have got a chance at them.

"Curse the scoundrels!" the lawyer cried.

"I'm cut in a dozen places!"

"So am I!" replied the officer, "and when I turned to help you I got a paving-stone in the small of me back that feels as big as if a brick house had fallen on me.

"I would have been willing to take me oath on a stack of Bibles as big as the station-house, that there wasn't a feller in der gang but phat had four pair of hands, for niver since I was born was I afther seein' sich peltin'.

"Bad 'cess to the spalpeen! it's bruck me toe is!" yelled the officer, at this point, as a piece of rock about half the size of a cobble-stone came down on his foot.

The crowd fairly howled with delight as they watched the officer caper about and swear, and the stones came faster than ever.

By this time there were fully fifty people, men, women and children engaged in the agreeable—to them—occupation of stoning the intruders, while the Widow Flannigan stood in her doorway and encouraged the gang with warlike cries.

"Give it to 'em, b'yes!" she yelled at the top of her lungs.

"Bad 'cess to the murtherin' cop and that black-hearted thafe of a lawyer!"

"We must run for our lives or we will surely be killed!" Wimple exclaimed, as a stone fully as big as a boy's fist descended full upon the crown of his hat, smashing it in and completely ruining the article besides inflicting a violent blow on the head.

"Go it and kill wan of the b'astes if ye can!" cried the policeman who had just received a stone in the stomach which almost doubled him up with pain.

Then, with a yell, the two men started, discharging their revolvers as they got into motion.

The members of the gang who were in front of the two did not attempt to stand, but scattered in all directions in the wildest kind of a panic, but the others behind at once gave chase, and then was witnessed the spectacle of the two running for their lives with all of the gang, men, women and children, in full chase.

But the moment the fugitives got out of the limits of Shantyville—got clear of the houses and the rocks into the open ground, the pursuit ceased.

Afar in the distance these hawk-eyed vagabonds caught sight of the police-reserve hurrying to the battle-field.

CHAPTER XXV.

BAFFLED AGAIN.

NEWS had been carried to the station-house that there was a regular riot in progress in Shantyville and that two policemen had been hemmed in by the gang and were being murdered.

The sergeant in command of the police-station at once hurried to the scene with all the force at his command.

And at the approach of the blue-coats, armed with their long "night-sticks," and evidently prepared for war, the gang who had handled the two men so roughly disappeared as if by magic.

And when the police came up to the two men, who had sat down upon a stone by the wayside and were endeavoring with their handkerchiefs to remove the blood from their faces and repair damages as well as they were able, there wasn't a soul of the gang to be seen.

Shantyville was as quiet as though it was a deserted village.

"Well, well, you're a nice-looking object!" the sergeant remarked to the Irish patrolman, as the rescuing party came up to him.

"Yis, sor, ye can say that widout the l'aste taste of a lie, and ye can take me head for a fut-ball if I don't feel jist as bad as I look," the officer replied, sorrowfully.

"Upon me wourd if ye hadn't come jist as ye did, I bel'ave I would have been dead an hour ago!"

"How are you, sergeant?" said the lawyer, who, recognizing in the officer an old acquaintance, rose and tendered his hand.

The sergeant had to take a second look at the speaker in order to be sure that he knew him.

"Why, can I believe my eyes? It's Lawyer Wimple!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, what is left of him," replied the other, ruefully as he shook hands with the sergeant.

"Hang me if I didn't think you were some old tramp, whom Mike here had captured!"

The lawyer shook his head as he looked upon his fine suit of clothes, almost ruined by the dirty articles which had come in contact with his person.

"Well, I have been in some pretty bad scrapes in my life, but I think this is about the roughest deal that I ever struck."

"How did it happen?"

Then Wimple related the particulars of the whole affair, and when he had finished, the sergeant shook his head gravely.

"Why, Wimple, both you and Mike ought to have better sense than to have tried such a game up in this district."

"I tell you what it is, I would no more attempt to go into Shantyville to take a man out without three or four good men at my back, than I would go down into a den of wildcats, and try to take the cubs away from their mother."

"Well, I understand it now, but I didn't then," the lawyer replied, dolefully.

"I thought of course that the woman wouldn't dare to show fight."

"Not fight!" exclaimed the officer. "Why, that woman—that Widow O'Flannigan is a holy terror."

"I've known her to lay out the best man in Shantyville."

"I would sooner back her to stand up against Sullivan for four rounds, than half the men who try the game. She might not down him, but she would be there when the fourth round was called, you bet!"

"Sergeant, I want blood, do ye mind?" exclaimed the Irish policeman in a rage, as he contemplated his ruined uniform.

"I'm shure I kin identify half-a-dozen of the blaggards that 'salted' and battered me, and there was wan feller with a wart on his cheek and a turn-up nose, who smashed an egg between me eyes—and, oh, sergeant! the hin that laid that egg ought to have been kilt a year ago!"

"I am sure I would know that red-headed, lantern-jawed, bandy-legged b'aste anywhere, if I didn't mate him for a thousand years!"

"All right; we have force enough, and we'll make a general pull; we'll take in every man, woman and child that you think you can swear to!" the officer declared.

"I'll appear against that infernal widow!" the lawyer exclaimed.

"I'll be cursed if my chest isn't sore yet from the effects of the blow she gave me!"

"She came pretty near knocking you out in the first round, eh?" suggested the sergeant.

"When I get her in a police court I'll knock her out!" the lawyer replied, vindictively.

"And I'll get a chance to search the house, too, now, and see if the girl is hidden there; I do not doubt that she is, and that is the reason the woman kicked up the row."

"That doesn't follow. I have known her for nearly ten years now, and I never knew the time when she wasn't ready for a fight, with or without provocation."

"If she was a man she'd be the biggest prize-

fighter that ever stepped into a ring; as it is she has managed to knock out every man who has dared to stand up against her, but I don't think she will knock this gang out to-day," and the officer glanced with an air of admiration upon his well-armed, determined-looking men.

"Mind, boys, no nonsense with these terriers to-day," he continued.

"If any of them attempt to show fight, go in and lay 'em right out."

"We have got to teach this gang a lesson some time, and we might as well get in our work to-day as any other time. Forward!"

Away the column went.

As they entered the settlement not a soul was to be seen, except a few old men and women, and some little children who had been too young to take any part in the fight.

"Old fellow, I reckon we are only going to have our labor for our pains," the sergeant observed to Wimple, after the party had got well into the settlement and the fact that the town was almost deserted had been ascertained.

"The gang that gave you such a lively fight have come to the conclusion that discretion is the better part of valor, and they have skipped."

"Well, if the girl has gone I shall be able to get on their track," remarked the lawyer, attempting to console himself with the reflection.

But to the astonishment of all of them, when the grocery store of the widow was reached, there sat the buxom dame, in the open doorway, conversing with old Tom O'Hare as placidly as though nothing at all out of the way had happened.

"The top of the mornin' to ye, sergeant, dear," she said, with the utmost politeness, rising and dropping a courtesy as the policemen halted outside of the door.

"It's sorry I am to see ye in the company of sich a blaggard as this thafe of a lawyer!" and she scowled darkly at Wimple as she spoke.

"Mrs. O'Flannigan, this is pretty rough treatment that your gang has given this officer and this gentleman," the sergeant remarked, sternly.

"My gang!" exclaimed the woman, throwing up her hands.

"Oh, the saints be good to me! did iver any one hear the like of that? and me as innocent as a kitten!"

"Shure, I had nothin' at all to do wid the attack on the cop, and I'll go bail that a decent gntleman like him will niver go for to sav a lie ag'in' a poor widdy woman."

"No, I haven't anything to say ag'in her," the policeman admitted, except that when she let a yell out of her the gang began to 'rock' me."

"Shure, it was only the childers with their foolishness," the widow explained.

"Well, I have a charge to make against her!" Wimple exclaimed, "and I want you to take her in, officer."

"And I've a wourd to say ag'in' him, sergeant, and I want yees to run him in!" the widow exclaimed.

"He 'sulted me when I ordered him to l'ave me store, and it's black and blue I am, and Tom O'Hare here, a decint man, will swear to it!"

"Faith and I will, sergeant, and if it hadn't been for the b'yes outside I bel'ave he would have kilt the widdy!" the old man protested.

"Come along, and the justice will settle who is to blame; and now, Mrs. O'Flannigan, I want to examine your premises," the officer said.

"Certainly, sergeant, dear, I'm always glad to see a gntleman like yourself in me house."

And without the least reluctance she allowed the police to search the house.

As the sergeant had expected from her manner the girl was not found nor any signs to denote that she had been in the house.

Wimple jumped to the conclusion that she had taken advantage of the delay and escaped with the other fugitives.

Mrs. O'Flannigan was the only prisoner captured during the raid, for there wasn't a single one in the settlement whom either the lawyer or the policeman could identify as having been concerned in the attack.

The party proceeded straight to the Yorkville Police Court which was in session, and the case was tried without delay.

As it happened the judge who presided was not an acquaintance of the lawyer, and being actively mixed up in local politics, with an ambitious longing for a higher sphere than the one he now occupied, he was disposed to deal leniently with a woman who possessed as much influence as did the widow with the voters of the district.

All that Wimple could swear to was one blow while the widow swore she received a dozen, and old Tom backed up her story.

"You ought not to bring such a case as this into court," was the judge's decision. "You were in the wrong to attempt to search her house without a warrant and you ought to know better. Case is dismissed."

The widow departed in triumph while the lawyer had a cab called and was driven down-town, where he immediately set the detectives to work to find the girl. He was eager for vengeance.

CHAPTER XXVI.
IN DURANCE VILE.

WHEN Hugh Strong awoke from the stupor produced by the heavy blows which he had received from the butt of Black Bud's revolver he found himself in about as unpleasant a position as the wit of man could well devise.

From the blows he experienced but little inconvenience, for he had too hard a head to suffer materially from a few light taps, for so he considered the blows of the cracksman to be.

The Lightweight possessed to a great degree the wonderful wild-beast faculty of seeing in the dark; this gift he had acquired during a three months' imprisonment in an Algerine dungeon, beneath an old castle, a relic of the feudal times, and in his cell the sun never shone.

Hugh's love of adventure had led him into this plight.

The ship to which he had belonged had stopped at the Algerine port, and with some of his shipmates the young American had gone ashore to see the sights.

An Algerine lady of noble birth, the daughter of the governor of the castle which defended the port happened to catch sight of the handsome young "Frank," as all the white men are usually called in the Eastern clime, and the girl's heart was touched.

She found a way by means of a faithful slave to communicate with the American, and he had pluck enough to accept the appointment which she tendered.

He scaled the high wall of the garden attached to the governor's palace wherein the girl resided and under the spreading branches of the olive trees held delightful converse with the maiden.

She was the governor's favorite daughter, had been educated in France, and as the Lightweight conversed fluently in that language they found no difficulty in understanding one another.

Half-a-dozen of these stolen interviews were held, and then by an unlucky chance the lovers were discovered.

The young American would have offered a desperate resistance and undoubtedly would have effected his escape, for he was well armed and fully a match for half-a-dozen of the clumsy and cowardly Algerines, had not the girl in her terror thrown her arms around him and so impeded his efforts.

After being captured he was conveyed to the deepest and darkest cell that the castle boasted, and the matter was managed so secretly that none of his shipmates were able to find out what had become of him, and it was the general impression that he had been murdered by some of the Algerine cut-throats, always on the watch for European victims, and his body cast into the sea.

The ship sailed without him, and for three long months he lay in the dark dungeon without a single glimpse of the blessed sun and never seeing a soul besides the negro who acted as his jailer and brought him food and water.

During this time the eyes of the prisoner became so accustomed to the gloom of his prison cell that he was able to distinguish objects as well as though he had the full benefit of the daylight.

At last the governor intended to get rid of his prisoner.

He had sent his daughter to visit some relatives in the interior, and they had reported that the girl seemed to be as crazy about the young Frank as ever, and that time and absence had not effected a cure of her idiotic passion—as her father considered it—for the stranger.

The governor did not want to kill the young man, although in his opinion he richly deserved death for daring to lift his eyes to the Algerine maid, for he was a little afraid that by some ill-chance he might be called to an account for the crime, and then too he could turn an honest penny by selling the young man as a slave to the traders who trafficked with the interior.

But the long confinement had not tamed the spirit of the young man, and when he was brought forth at the midnight hour to be conveyed to the traders' vessel, he was all prepared for a desperate attempt to escape.

He had managed to secrete an old knife, which had been furnished him at his meals, and had constructed a saw from it, and had worked at his fetters which confined his wrists, until he had nearly cut them through, so when he was rowed out to the trading-vessel which lay in the harbor, his guards had little idea that he was almost as good as a free man.

Believing that the "Frank" was securely fettered, the guards did not trouble themselves to carry him below after he was placed on board of the vessel, but allowed him to remain on deck.

Immediately after the prisoner's arrival the trading-vessel was gotten under way, and no sooner was she under full headway than Hugh snapped the handcuffs asunder with the greatest ease and leaped overboard.

He was well prepared for such a desperate attempt, for he was attired in the lightest kind of costume, wearing only a shirt and an old pair of breeches, the Algerine jailer having helped himself to all his clothes immediately after he was placed in the dungeon.

The vessel was a clumsy one, the Moors poor sailors, and although the alarm was instantly given that the captive had plunged into the sea, no one on board of the craft had the slightest suspicion that the prisoner was a free man, but all supposed that in his desperation he had preferred death to slavery, and had leaped into the sea to find a grave beneath the dark waters; so when the vessel was finally put about and she cruised up and down in search of the fugitive without succeeding in discovering him, the Algerines came to the natural conclusion that he had perished.

Hugh was an excellent swimmer, could dive like a duck and remain under water for five minutes at a time, and as the night was a dark one he had no trouble at all in evading the Algerines.

Twice the vessel came within a hundred feet of him as he swam steadily toward the lights of a ship which he had noticed riding at anchor as the Algerine vessel put to sea, and from the peculiarities of her build and rig the Lightweight judged that she was either American or English.

Hugh gained the deck of the ship without any difficulty, although he came within an ace of being shot by the sailors on watch, who jumped to the conclusion that he was an Algerine water-rat, as the thieves who prey on the shipping are usually termed.

The skipper of the English craft was true to the doctrine of his country which declares that the British flag protects all it waves over, and the fugitive received a hearty welcome, was enrolled among the crew, and, with the ship, bade Algiers a long farewell.

We have taken pains to relate this incident at length, for it fully reveals the dogged determination of our hero's character, and illustrates by what strange chances he acquired the gifts which made him so truly marvelous a man.

The faculty which he had acquired during his sojourn in the Algerine dungeon, of seeing in the dark, stood him in good stead now.

So when he recovered his senses, sat up and looked around him, he had not the slightest difficulty in making out all the surroundings as soon as his eyes became accustomed to the place.

"Well, this is a lively deal," he remarked, when he had fully mastered all the details of the situation.

"This place is about on a par with that Algerine dungeon, excepting that that was constructed out of stone, while this seems to be hollowed out of the solid rock.

"There's a spot over there, though, which seems to be earth, and if it is, I shouldn't be surprised if I can perform a feat in the engineering line which will be apt to make this Daddy Blazes open his eyes, if I can contrive to get rid of these handcuffs and find something which I can turn into a digging tool.

"There are two ifs in the way, but my star has carried me through too many difficulties for me to doubt that I shall be able to get out of this scrape.

"It is considerable of a joke on me in the amateur detective line to be captured by the man whom I had come to entrap; that is turning the tables with a vengeance, but there is an old saying that he laughs best who laughs last, and it may be so in this case," he mused, as he reflected upon the situation.

"So far, the advantage is most decidedly with Daddy Blazes; there is no use of my attempting to ignore the fact.

"He has succeeded in getting me in a tight place and no mistake; but now that he has succeeded in capturing me, what is he going to do with me?

"Another point!

"Who was the man who came to the old fellow's assistance and to whom I am indebted for those scientifically administered cracks on the head which so quickly laid me out?"

The captive pondered over this matter for a few moments.

"It is dollars to cents in my opinion that it was the man I was after, this Black Bud in person.

"He evidently was concealed in the room somewhere, though where is a mystery, for there did not seem to be any room to hide so big an object as a man away.

"But I'm rather quick to jump to that conclusion though, for who would be apt to suppose that there was any such hole as this around the shanty.

"I suppose I am in the cellar of the house, although from the outside there wasn't any indication that the shanty had a cellar.

"I am on the scent though, anyway, and if I had not been hot on the trail, there wouldn't have been any excuse for trying to get rid of me."

CHAPTER XXVII.

PRISONER AND JAILER.

THIS WAS a consoling thought and did much to relieve the mind of our hero.

He had struck the right scent at the beginning, and in his opinion, although at present his adversaries had the advantage, yet he had

not the least doubt that in some way he would succeed in getting out of the scrape.

He rose to his feet and made a careful survey of his dungeon.

The dark section of the wall which he had taken to be earth he found to be plank, but from the sound that they gave when he struck them with his clinched fist, he felt satisfied that the wood was placed against solid earth.

This discovery gave the prisoner a deal of satisfaction.

"When this apartment was constructed it is very evident that the man who planned it hadn't any notion that it would be used as a prison house or else he never would have formed a part of the wall out of planks," the captive observed, communing with himself after the fashion of men much used to solitude.

"From their looks, having entirely lost their original color, it is probable that they have been in their position for a good long time, possibly ever since the place was built, and they must be pretty well rotted by this time from their close contact with the earth behind them.

"Then, too, there comes in another point: what is the nature of the soil which requires to be planked up in this manner?

"Loose, sandy stuff of course, or else the wall would keep in place without requiring the planks.

"If it was hard solid earth no boards would be required.

"Ergo then, the moment I get the planks away I will find it an easy matter to tunnel through the sand, and I will contrive to remove the planks so that I can replace them again when I have reason to fear interruption, and so I can conceal what I am doing, until I get ready to levant for good.

He never troubled his mind in regard to the method of removing the planks, unprovided as he was with tools, nor how he would be able to tunnel through the earth.

Time enough to attend to these details he believed when he was about to commence the work.

He did not for an instant doubt that he would be able in some way to accomplish the task.

The first thing to be done was to remove the handcuffs.

As long as he was fettered he would not be able to accomplish much.

He felt in his pockets and discovered that while in his insensible state some one had "gone through" him in the most thorough manner.

"They took even my knife," he soliloquized, "and there is where they were wise, for with such a tool as that I would have made quick work in getting out of this place."

The knife to which the young man referred was one of the pattern much in favor with seafaring men.

A single-bladed tool, the blade about five inches long by three-quarters of an inch wide, and when it was opened a spring in the back held the blade in place and prevented it from closing, so that in an emergency it made a pretty serviceable weapon.

"I am not so well posted about handcuffs as I might be," he observed as he began his examination of the "bracelets."

"Aha!" he exclaimed in accents that denoted a great deal of satisfaction, after a careful scrutiny of the ornaments.

"It is as I thought it might be," he continued, and then seating himself upon the edge of the old table in the center of the room, he proceeded to squeeze his right hand through the handcuff.

It was a rather tight fit, but after a few moments' patient trial he succeeded.

This was what he had referred to when he exclaimed: "It is as I thought it might be!"

The Lightweight was gifted with an extra large wrist joined to a medium-sized hand, so that when a handcuff was adjusted to fit on the wrist it was almost certain that the owner of the wrist would be able to slip his hand through the steel band.

"And as my right hand is a trifle larger than my left there isn't any doubt I shall be able to get the cuff off of the other wrist without any difficulty.

"That leaves me free to work, and old Daddy Blazes will find that he has made a big mistake if he thinks he can keep me in this dungeon cell any longer than I desire to stay."

Then he slipped the handcuff on again.

"There, no one would suspect that I could do the trick so easily!" he exclaimed with a great deal of satisfaction.

"Now I'm going to take a nap," he continued. "The bed is not an inviting one," and he cast a critical glance at the heap of straw in the corner, "but I shouldn't be surprised to discover that I have slept on worse in my time, and if any one plays the spy upon me in my sleeping hours they will find me all right, a helpless prisoner as securely in Daddy Blazes's power as a rat in a trap.

"I am not in the least in a hurry," he continued, as he threw himself upon the pile of straw, "and perhaps this capture, which certainly appears to be a very bad thing for me at the first blush, may turn out to be the best stroke of luck which could have happened to me, for by being placed here one of the secret holes connected

with the old shanty is revealed to me and I am given a clew where to look for others, for I haven't the least doubt that the fox has more than one.

"Then, too, the chances are at least a hundred to one that he will interview me for the purpose of learning what my little game is.

"He will get some information out of me, and in return I may secure some from him, although he will not be apt to give me any if he knows it, but his very questions to me will be apt to aid me in spite of the caution he undoubtedly will try to use."

And while cogitating upon this pleasant prospect the Lightweight fell fast asleep, sinking into slumber without the least trouble and in no way worried by the fact that he was a prisoner in the hands of a man who would be apt to prove a vindictive foe, particularly to an enemy who was helpless in his grasp.

For fully six hours the captive slept the sleep of the just and then he was suddenly awakened by the rays of a lantern flashed upon his face.

He opened his eyes and beheld Daddy Blazes seated by the table, upon which was placed a tubular lantern, flanked on one side by a small loaf of bread and on the other by what appeared to be a bowl of coffee.

In the hand of the old man glistened an ugly-looking bowie-knife, and the manner in which it was displayed made the fact quite plain that Daddy Blazes was afraid to trust himself alone unarmed with the prisoner, even though the captive was handcuffed.

"Come, rouse up, I want to have a talk with you," the old man remarked, when he perceived the other open his eyes, awakened from his peaceful sleep by the glare of the light.

The Lightweight sat up.

"I say, daddy!" he exclaimed, "whoever made this bed was not particular enough; it seems to me as if there was a lot of cobblestones under the straw."

The old man frowned; this levity on the part of the captive was not at all to his liking. It had been his idea that the stranger would not be quite so unconcerned considering the predicament he was in.

"You don't like your quarters, eh?"

"Oh, the place is well enough," Hugh answered, carelessly, "and the bunk wouldn't be bad if there was a little more straw and the stones were taken out."

"You are in a tight place, young man!" Daddy Blazes exclaimed, sternly.

"Oh, yes, but I have been in tighter places in my time," the other answered.

"Well, now, I doubt that!"

"You don't know anything about it!" the Lightweight retorted.

"So what right have you got to say anything about it?"

"Talk about something you know, Daddy and then you will never make a bad break."

"Well, of all the impudent scoundrels that I ever met, I think you are the worst!" the old man exclaimed, enraged at the speech of the other.

"That's your opinion, no doubt, but it ain't worth shucks."

"Now in my time I have met with a lot of villains; you are about as ugly in person, and in face, as any of them, but I have met a dozen or two who could double discount you when it comes right down to bloody work."

"Wait until I get through with you, and then you may have reason to change your opinion!" the old man growled.

"Oh, you can't scare me with your threats!" the captive rejoined.

"I want you to understand that I have seen barking dogs before."

"You will find that I am one of the kind that not only barks but bites as well!"

"I will believe it when I know it be a fact!"

"Your present position ought to be some proof."

"Not a bit of it!"

"I was hot on the trail of the man I sought; he took advantage of a favorable opportunity and layed me out; then in order to give him time to escape you decided to shut me up in this hole."

"There is the whole thing in a nutshell; that is the truth and you know it."

"When Black Bud is out of danger you will release me."

"Oh, no, not until I learn your secrets, and I have made up my mind to force you to talk."

"I have your breakfast here, but unless you tell me what I wish to learn I shall take it away and leave you to starve!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HONEST TRUTH.

WITH the utmost malignity the old man hissed out the threat.

But much to the astonishment of Daddy Blazes, the captive was not in the least appalled by the threat.

In fact he actually laughed in the face of the old man.

"Perhaps you don't think that I am in earnest in this matter," Daddy Blazes observed.

"If that is your thought you never made a bigger mistake in your life, for I mean every word I say."

"Oh, I don't doubt that in the least," the Lightweight replied.

"That wasn't what I was laughing at."

"What then?"

"Why, at the idea that you were donkey enough to think that you can scare a man like myself with threats, and then, too, the thought came to me that if you questioned me upon any point that I didn't care to post you on, how easy it would be to either swear to you that I didn't know anything about it, or else stuff you with some lie hatched to suit the occasion."

"Well, I must say that you are a candid sort of a rooster," the old man growled.

"Oh, yes; there isn't any mistake about that. That is the kind of a chap I am."

"In this case, clever as you think yourself, neither of your little games will work," Daddy Blazes remarked.

"In the first place, I know that you possess the information that I desire, and so no amount of swearing that you may indulge in will turn me from my purpose, and in regard to the second, I am so situated that I shall be aware whether you are telling me the truth or not, so you cannot fool me in that way."

"Armed at all points, eh?"

And the captive laughed as if he regarded the matter as being a jest and was not at all disposed to take it in a serious light.

Daddy Blazes did not know exactly what to make of the Lightweight.

The fellow was brave enough; there wasn't any doubt in regard to that; and tolerably shrewd, too, but still it seemed as if his bravery was of the foolhardy kind, or else he would never have attempted single-handed to take a prisoner out of Shantyville.

The only reason the old man could assign for his conduct was that he really did not know the extent of the danger to which he was exposed.

"Well, I fancy that before you get through with me you will come to the conclusion that it would have been far better for you if you had not allowed yourself to become mixed up in this affair, for I want you to understand that you are about as near death as you will ever come until you actually feel the death-rattle in your throat."

"So you may think, but you are no prophet, and I don't believe you really know anything about it," the other retorted.

By this time the old man had come to the conclusion that it was merely wasting breath in endeavoring to make an impression upon the prisoner, and so he gave up the attempt and came at once to the subject he had in view.

"I told you I was in search of information," he remarked, "and to begin at the beginning, who are you, anyway?"

"Well, I don't believe you will get much information out of my answer, for I don't think you ever heard of me before," the other rejoined.

"My name is Hugh Strong."

"Are you in the public or private detective line?"

"Nary detective."

"Oh, come, come!" exclaimed Daddy Blazes, impatiently. "There isn't any use for you to beat about the bush with me."

"If you are not a detective, what are you doing here in disguise?"

"Disguise!" exclaimed Hugh.

"Yes; that is what I said," answered the old man, testily.

"You are in disguise, of course, for you are not a sailor."

"Oh, ain't I? Well, old chap, that is just where you are out of your reckoning, for I am a sailor, and though I say it who shouldn't, for self-praise I despise, I am as good an able-bodied seaman as ever took his trick at the wheel."

"What are you doing here then? Why did you mix yourself up in this matter?"

"Why, I am after a stake of course. If I succeed in capturing Black Bud it would be a good bit of money in my pocket."

"I wasn't aware that there was any reward offered for his capture," Daddy Blazes remarked.

"Some time ago there were parties who would have been willing to have given something handsome for his capture, but all the offers have been withdrawn."

"Oh, no; I am acting on behalf of a man who will pay me well if I can take the cracksman."

"Who is it?" asked the old man, bluntly.

"Franklyn Buckingham."

The old man had a good command over his features, and it was but seldom that he was betrayed into exhibiting any emotion whatever.

But on this occasion he was so completely taken by surprise that he could not refrain from a slight start indicative of the amazement which he felt.

The name was the very last one which he expected to hear.

"Franklyn Buckingham!" he exclaimed, reflectively, trying to conceal the astonishment which he had been betrayed into exhibiting.

"Why, why it seems to me as if that name was familiar to me."

"Oh, yes, he's one of your big New Yorkers," the Lightweight answered, carelessly, acting as if he had not noticed the quick start given by the other, which, however, had not escaped the notice of his quick eyes, trained by a life of observation.

"Yes, yes; I remember now. I was sure I had heard the name somewhere."

"But he is neither attached to the police department nor in the private detective line if I remember rightly," Daddy Blazes observed.

"Well, I reckon not!" the other exclaimed, scornfully.

"A man who is worth about twenty millions isn't apt to trouble his head about such matters."

"Oh, is he a man of that stamp?" the old man asked, as though he was not familiar with the facts in the case.

"So it is said; twenty millions or thereabouts. The world is not particular you know to a million more or less when estimating the wealth of these money kings."

"And you say you are acting in behalf of this man?"

"That is my statement."

"What does such a nabob want with this poor wretch of a cracksman?"

"What is such a man as Black Bud to him?"

The Lightweight hesitated for a moment.

Was it best to disclose the whole truth or not?

He could easily pretend that when he had been instructed to capture John Buddock, the reason why the man was wanted was not made known to him.

It would be an utter impossibility for the old man to tell whether it was the truth or not.

Or, on the other hand, he could reveal exactly why the cracksman was pursued.

But a second's reflection showed him that this would not be the wisest course to pursue, for it would serve to put the old man on his guard if he had anything to do with the matter, and Hugh had conceived the idea that Daddy Blazes was the go-between who arranged the details of the attacks—who acted as the agent of the secret enemy who apparently bore such a hatred to the prosperous merchant, and who engaged the tools to carry out the plans conceived by the master-scoundrel.

Upon deliberation, then, he came to the conclusion that it would be the wisest plan only to reveal a part of the truth.

Something might be gained by so doing, and, as far as the adventurer could see, nothing would be lost.

"Well, see here, old man, I don't know as I ought to give this snap away," the Lightweight remarked, keeping up to the life his assumed character of the reckless, devil-may-care sailor.

"You had better, for you are in a tight place here, and unless I see that you are disposed to do what I want, it will go hard with you," the old man replied, threateningly.

"Well, I don't know as it will do much harm," the other remarked, in a musing sort of way, as if he was meditating over the matter.

"You know that I am after Black Bud, and what difference does it make if you are also aware of why he is wanted?"

"None at all."

"I suppose it was the cracksman who gave me the licks on the head that laid me out?" Hugh said, abruptly.

"You can suppose anything you like. There isn't any law ag'in' it as far as I know," answered the old man, with a grin.

"Well, I only wanted to know so that I might have an opportunity to return the favor one of these days."

"You had better wait until you get out of this scrape before you begin to calculate about getting into another," the old man observed.

"But come to the point. Why does this Buckingham want Black Bud captured?"

"Because he is the man who set fire to his house in Forty-second street the other night."

Again Daddy Blazes started, for this was the second time that he had been completely taken by surprise.

"Oh, that is absurd!" he exclaimed, endeavoring to conceal the annoyance he felt.

"Black Bud is a cracksman—a housebreaker. Such a crime as arson is entirely out of his line."

"He did this job for all that, for there's a witness who can swear dead against him."

This positive statement perplexed the old man.

He did not doubt its truth, for if it was not true, how had suspicion fastened so quickly upon the cracksman? Immediate measures must be taken to meet this blow, so the old man rose.

"Well, you will not catch Buddock this time, I guess, and you must content yourself to remain here for a while."

And then he departed.

CHAPTER XXIX.
THE LAWYERS.

NEVER in all his life had the criminal lawyer been so thoroughly enraged as at his defeat by the old woman.

Not only had his feelings been lacerated, but his person had suffered.

He had been struck fifty times at least by the missiles which had been hurled with such right good will, and he showed a couple of score, or more, of black and blue spots, to say nothing of the cuts on his face, as proof of the damage he had received.

He thought there was a chance to make some money out of the affair, and now he was after blood as well.

The girl was in the possession of the old woman; there wasn't much doubt about that; or at all events she knew where she was concealed, and thanks to the knowledge which the supposed mother of the child, the dead Polly Hibbard, had confided to him, he knew the parentage of the girl, and this was where he had a most decided advantage over Mrs. O'Flannigan, who evidently was in total ignorance of the fact, and as far as Wimple could see there wasn't any way by which she would be able to gain the information which had only come to the mother of the child in the strangest fashion and purely by accident.

Apparently the chances were all in his favor, with the exception of the fact that he did not know the whereabouts of the girl.

But this was a difficulty that he thought could be easily remedied.

He felt perfectly satisfied that Mrs. O'Flannigan either had the girl in her possession or knew where she could be found.

In fact he felt pretty well satisfied that the girl was in the old woman's shanty when he had visited it, or else she would never have kicked up such a row when he proposed to search the place.

That she was not found by the police when they searched the house was easily accounted for.

After the repulse of himself and the officer by the hosts of Shantytown, the old woman had calculated upon his returning with so strong a force of police that she would not be able to resist them, even when backed by all the gang that resided amid the rocks, and so the girl had been hurried away to some other hiding-place, but that she could be found Wimple nothing doubted.

Revenge as well as avarice was now hurrying him forward, and he was determined to leave no stone unturned to accomplish his purpose.

As one of the leading criminal lawyers in the city he was of course well acquainted with all the private detective firms in the city, and, as we have previously stated, he set them all at work to discover the girl.

He did not employ one firm alone, but went to every private detective office in the city that amounted to anything.

"I want to find a girl named Milicent Hibbard," he stated to each and every one.

"Daughter of a woman called Polly Hibbard, who used to live in Fiftieth street, near First avenue."

"The girl is about seventeen, with dark brown hair and eyes of the same color. Is supposed to have been in the house of the Widow Bidy O'Flannigan, in Shantytown, up to yesterday morning, and is now probably concealed in the house of some friend of this woman."

"I will give a hundred dollars to be brought face to face with the girl."

This was quite a liberal offer, and all the detectives immediately said that they would "go in" for it.

Some of them, more curious than the rest, ventured to ask the lawyer why he was so anxious to find the girl.

To the question he replied at once with the appearance of the greatest frankness, for he was prepared for just such a thing, that he wanted her as a witness.

Her testimony was of considerable importance in a certain case, and he was willing to go as high as a hundred dollars for it.

Now this seemed to be a reasonable explanation, and the detectives were satisfied that for once in his life the lawyer had spoken the truth.

After this bit of machinery was put into operation the lawyer mused over the situation a bit.

"Now it is just possible that this infernal Irishwoman may succeed in finding out the truth in regard to the parentage of the girl," he remarked.

"It is not likely, but as the French say: 'It is the unexpected that is always happening.'"

"So it behooves me to be on my guard against anything of the kind; therefore it seems to me that the quicker I put myself in communication with the old man's lawyers the better."

Promptness in action was one of the lawyer's greatest merits, and in this matter he allowed no time to run to waste.

Quarter of an hour later he was on lower Broadway, ascending by means of that modern man-saver, the elevator, to the third floor of one of the massive buildings devoted to offices,

with which the lower end of New York's great artery abounds.

"Batterkin, Jones & De Courcy" was the eminent legal firm of whom he was in search.

Of all the "high-toned" legal firms in the metropolis none ranked higher than this one whom we have mentioned.

Batterkin, the senior partner, had served his country as a senator at Washington, besides having been honored by his fellow-citizens with a dozen minor offices; Jones—the head of the ancient family known as the Washington Heights Jones—was one of the ablest lawyers in the country; Judge Jones, he was always called, having worn the ermine for a long term of years.

He was the brains of the office, attending to the getting up of the cases, while De Courcy, a descendant of the English family who once owned a square mile on the East River, attended to all the office business, receiving clients, etc., the senator doing the heavy work before the judges.

De Courcy, a little dark, dapper fellow, who looked like a Frenchman and prided himself upon the fact, received Wimple in the politest manner.

In fact, De Courcy was one of those men who could no more help being polite than he could help breathing.

Wimple introduced him, explained that he came on particular business relating to one of Batterkin, Jones and De Courcy's clients, and asked the favor of a private interview.

The polite little man at once said he would be delighted to oblige his eminent legal brother, and as he ushered the other into his private office incidentally remarked how much pleasure it gave him to make the acquaintance of gentlemen who occupied so great a portion of the public eye as his visitor.

To use the vernacular, this was "taffy" of course. Wimple understood that, for he knew that lawyers of the standing of Batterkin, Jones and De Courcy rather looked askance at the legal lights who flourished best in the shadows of a criminal court, but still it wasn't bad to take, and Wimple smiled, and bowed and murmured how much pleasure it gave him to discover that his fame was known to such distinguished advocates as his hosts.

Seated in De Courcy's sanctum, secure from interruption, Wimple proceeded at once to business.

"Mr. Franklyn Bookingham is a client of yours, I believe?" he said.

"He is."

"You have sole charge of his legal affairs?"

"We do."

"If I mistake not, some fifteen years ago Mr. Bookingham suffered a very serious loss?"

The habitual smile which always played like a mask over the face of the little, dapper man, and so enabled him to conceal the real state of his feelings, for a time vanished, and the lawyer appeared grave.

He was astonished at this beginning, for the subject was one of which he had not heard much for nearly ten years.

"You refer to the loss of his child?" said the lawyer, coming at once to the point without the least reserve.

"Yes, I do."

"You are correct; about fifteen years ago Mr. Franklyn Bookingham's only daughter was stolen away from her home, and no trace has ever been discovered of her from that day to this."

"Mr. Bookingham spent a small fortune, I believe, in his search for his child?"

"Yes, a very large sum of money indeed, but he might as well have thrown it into the river for all the good it did."

"If I have not been misinformed, you had charge of the affair?"

"Yes, you are right; I had the entire matter under my control. Mr. Bookingham was so prostrated by the calamity as to be almost incapable for a long time of attending to any business."

"Was there any reward offered for the recovery of the child?—you see, Mr. De Courcy, this affair happened before my time, as I only came to New York some ten years ago," Wimple explained.

"Yes, there was a large reward offered—a colossal sum. I may say, for at one time we in this office were prepared to pay twenty-five thousand dollars for the return of the child, or for any information that would surely lead to her recovery."

"You see, it was the theory of the police at the time that the child had been abducted for the purpose of obtaining a large reward for its return."

"Very probable."

"But Mr. Bookingham did not accept this view of the matter at all."

"Is that possible?" Wimple remarked, not that he took the least interest in the matter, but he did not deem it wise to allow the other to perceive this fact.

"Quite possible, my dear sir."

"He was of the opinion that the child had been abducted by a personal enemy for the purpose of wreaking vengeance upon him, and that

no money offer that he could make would be of any use."

"And it proved so, eh?"

"It did. The child was never heard of."

"Would the father be willing to pay now for intelligence of his long-lost child?"

CHAPTER XXX.

WIMPLE'S STORY.

DE COURCY leaned back in his chair and looked at his visitor in astonishment.

Long ago, in common with every one else, he had given up the child for dead, and now the words of his visitor, indicating that the old matter was about to come up afresh, amazed him.

"Really, my dear brother Wimple, is it possible that you know aught of this affair?" he asked.

"I think I do," the other rejoined, with a complacent air.

"You know, Mr. De Courcy, that my practice lies entirely in the criminal courts, and a man in my line is called upon to defend rogues and rascals of all degrees."

"Once in a while, as is only natural under the circumstances, we pick up information of importance, which hasn't anything to do with the case in hand."

"Ah, yes, I understand," De Courcy observed with a smile. "You are a sort of father confessor to the black sheep who employ you to release them from the meshes of the law."

"Exactly, and through this channel some strange facts came to my knowledge concerning a girl in regard to whose parentage there was a mystery."

"And I jump to the conclusion that from what you learned of the case, you came to the opinion that this girl is Mr. Bookingham's long-lost child."

"You are right. I was almost certain of it, and so I took pains to look the matter up."

"Of course, my dear Mr. De Courcy, I will not attempt to conceal from you that I had an eye to the main chance in going into the matter," Wimple admitted, frankly.

"Of course, certainly; that is understood. Why not?" asked the other.

"Is not the laborer worthy of his hire?"

"That is just my opinion."

"At the time when I first became interested in the case I did not know that Mr. Bookingham had offered any reward for the recovery of the child, although I assumed that he had, for it would have been very strange under the circumstances if he had not, being so rich a man that fifty or a hundred thousand dollars would be no more to him than a ten-dollar note to an ordinary person."

"In all his transactions the gentleman is liberal to a fault, and when I say that—I, who have had the honor to attend to all his legal matters for the last thirty years, you will understand that I am speaking within bounds when I state that he will not haggle over the price that is demanded by any one skillful enough to pluck his child from the dark obscurity into which she vanished fifteen years ago."

"I can do it—I am certain of it, and if I return the child, now a young and beautiful girl—a daughter such as any father in this wide world might be proud to own,"—Wimple unconsciously was dropping into his jury address at this point—"do you think that you will be safe in saying, on your honor as a gentleman and a lawyer, which is all the guarantee I require, that Mr. Bookingham will be willing to come down handsomely for my trouble?"

"Most certainly!"

"To the tune of twenty or twenty-five thousand dollars?" asked Wimple, just a little nervous, for it did not seem as if it was possible any such piece of good luck was likely to drop in his way.

"If you can return Franklyn Bookingham's long-lost daughter to his arms you will receive twenty-five thousand dollars!" exclaimed De Courcy, impressively.

"It's rather a large fee," Wimple began, but the other instantly interrupted him.

"Oh, nonsense!" De Courcy exclaimed. "It is really unprofessional for you to talk in that manner."

"No sum is too large for a lawyer to ask for his fee, provided the service is worth it and the client is able to pay it, and in the majority of cases it is well to be more particular about the last chance than the first," the representative of the great legal firm observed, with a knowing wink.

"You shall have the money, sir, if you can perform the service, I pledge you my word for that, so you can consider the twenty-five thousand dollars as surely yours, if you can produce the girl, just as if you had it now in your pocket-book."

"Oh, I have the girl safe enough!" Wimple exclaimed, confidently.

And in fact although she was not in his possession that circumstance did not trouble him at all for he felt certain that the search he had set on foot would not fail to discover the hiding-place of the girl.

"Stop a bit!" exclaimed the other.

"What is it?"

"I want to warn you of one thing."

"Yes?"

"Are you certain that you have the right girl?"

"Oh, no doubt about it!"

"So a dozen different parties said fifteen years ago, when the child disappeared, and the large reward was offered."

"As I said, fully a dozen parties came forward within the five years that followed the date of the child's disappearance, and each and every one was morally certain that the child they presented was Mr. Buckingham's stolen daughter, but not one of them was the true child, although some of the little ones came pretty closely to the description."

"There isn't any doubt about this one."

"Better make a careful examination and be certain before you pay out any money," the other cautioned.

"Pay out any money?" exclaimed Wimple as if in doubt.

"Oh, yes; you see, between old stagers like ourselves it is idle to beat about the bush," De Courcy replied in his smooth, easy way, smiling blandly and rubbing his soft white hands noiselessly together.

"I take it that in the course of your criminal practice you have run across the ingenious rascals who originally abducted the child—though what has kept them in the background all these years is a mystery—and that they have employed you to negotiate the matter."

"Oh, no, nothing of the sort, you are on a wrong scent entirely."

"Indeed?" and De Courcy elevated his eyebrows.

"Yes, yes, listen and you will see."

"One of my clients was a young rascal, who, whenever he got a little beer in him, was immediately seized with the idea that he was cut out for a great fighting man, and as he was not particular when these fits seized upon him, with whom he fought, or what weapons he used, it goes without saying that he got into some particularly nasty scrapes."

"The only friend he had in the world was his mother, an honest, hard-working woman, who, when her son got in durance vile always came to me to get him out."

"On one occasion she had no money, but I waived the fee and defended the son. In her gratitude she confided to me that the pretty girl who sometimes accompanied her to my office, was not her child, but an adopted daughter, and that she had been informed that the girl was really the offspring of a wealthy New Yorker, from whom she had been stolen."

"Her story ran as follows:

"About fifteen years ago she went to sew for a lady at Tarrytown, up the river, and when her work was done, started for Yonkers, where she then resided."

"Her pocket was picked at the dépôt, and so as she was a good walker she determined to proceed on foot."

"It was early in the morning, in the pleasant springtime, and such a tramp was more enjoyable than otherwise."

"On the way in a lonely spot on the road she encountered a little child."

"Thinking it had lost its way she questioned it, but the little one was too young to explain, and thinking it had strayed from Yonkers, on the outskirts of which she was, she took the child along with her."

"She inquired as she passed along, but no one knew the child, and so she determined to keep it herself."

"At that time she had trouble with her husband, who had run off with her six-year-old boy, and she never expected to see either of them again."

"After a few years the vagabond husband died in jail and the boy was sent back to her, to become the torment of her life, as it turned out."

"But she kept the little girl, having become almost as much attached to her as if she had been her own."

"When the little one was about seven years old, a friend of the mother, who had come from the old country in the same ship and who was now a dressmaker in New York, came on a visit."

"The moment she saw the child and heard how it came into the woman's possession, she declared she knew whose child it was."

"It is the very image of the mother and I should know it anywhere," she said.

"I lived in the family when the babe was born as seamstress and made all its clothes."

"It was stolen when it was about two years old, and every stitch it had on at the time was made by me."

"The clothes, which had been preserved, were brought, and the woman identified them at once."

"Besides, there were certain birth-marks on the body exactly as the woman stated."

"We must come to New York with the child at once, for our fortune is made!" she excitedly declared.

"She would not reveal the name of the parents, fearing that she might not get her share of the money expected, if the matter could be arranged without."

"But on the way she was suddenly seized with heart-disease, and died before she had a chance to reveal the secret!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

MORE INFORMATION.

"ABOUT as wonderful a tale as I ever heard," De Courcy observed.

"There is an old adage, you know, about truth being stranger than fiction," Wimple replied.

"Well, to resume my tale: my client was utterly at a loss what to do under the circumstances."

"She did not know the name of the gentleman to whom she was going in New York, and so was obliged to return home again, and when she consulted some of her friends in regard to the matter they laughed at the idea, and as the woman who had given the information in regard to the child was known to be in the habit of indulging in strong drink to excess, it threw a doubt over the whole matter."

"And so the adopted mother of the child never troubled her head any more about the affair, having come to the conclusion that the story was all a hallucination on the part of her city friend."

"About six months ago, though, she happened to mention the matter to me, and I at once jumped to the conclusion that there was something in the story and proceeded to look into the matter."

"You see, I took it for granted that the New York woman knew what she was talking about and that her tale was true."

"But fate seemed to take a pleasure in dealing ugly blows at the girl, and no sooner had I taken the matter in hand when death again interfered in the affair."

"The supposed mother died, and as no one knew that I was at all interested in her, I did not hear of her death until she had been dead for three months or more."

"The intelligence did not reach me until I had ascertained that the girl was undoubtedly Mr. Buckingham's long-lost child, and sought the mother to tell her that at last I had solved the mystery."

"Then, to my surprise, I found she was dead, and that the girl had disappeared, no one knew where."

"Yes, yes; really a most remarkable chapter of incidents," the other remarked.

"I should smile," replied Wimple, dropping into the current slang of the day.

"Well, to come to the end, I sought for the girl, and at last managed to find her, and when this was accomplished, I thought it was time to come to your firm so that you might know how matters stood."

"My dear Mr. Wimple, you stand to win twenty-five thousand dollars beyond a doubt, if you can prove the identity of the girl, and I assume that you feel pretty sure in regard to that point."

"Oh, yes, if I didn't I should not take all this trouble."

"We will communicate with Mr. Buckingham immediately and let him know of the discovery."

"Do so by all means, and when you wish to see the girl notify me and I will produce her."

"Certainly."

Then Wimple rose and after a few more words took his departure.

"This is a great piece of luck for this fellow to tumble into," De Courcy commented after the Tombs lawyer was gone.

"The scamp will seize upon a small fortune without any trouble at all, but it is the way that things go in this world."

At this moment the office-boy entered, bearing Mr. Buckingham's card.

"Show the gentleman in," said the lawyer.

"Speak of the devil and he appears," quoted De Courcy.

"He must have passed Wimple on the way. At any rate, it will save me the trouble of sending for him."

The boy conducted the merchant into the sanctum and the lawyer received him with due politeness.

"Good-morning, Mr. De Courcy," the visitor remarked, as he seated himself in the chair which the lawyer had placed for him.

"I have come to see you on an important bit of business this morning."

"It is lucky too that you have called, for you have saved me the trouble of sending for you."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I have some important information to communicate."

"Well, now, that is odd," the merchant remarked.

"How so?"

"That is exactly what has brought me to your office this morning. I have something important to say to you."

"Quite a coincidence," De Courcy observed.

"And the information which I have to offer will, I think, astonish you."

"That is precisely my idea in regard to what I have to say to you."

Then both laughed.

"Now prepare to be astonished," the lawyer continued, "for it is of your long-lost daughter that I am about to speak."

The merchant leaned back in his chair, a look of amazement upon his face.

"Information in regard to my lost daughter?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, which has just this moment reached me."

"Well, of all the strange things!" Bookingham cried.

"What is strange?" De Courcy asked.

"Why that is the very subject which I have come to talk to you about."

"That is odd, but allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Bookingham, for I think I may safely say I am in possession of information which will surely lead to the restoration of your child."

"That is precisely what I have come to say to you."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, a party has entered into communication with me this morning, who professes to be able to return my child."

"Ah, that is just like the double dealing of these shyster lawyers," De Courcy muttered to himself.

"The scamp was afraid that I might throw some obstacle in the way, and so he opened communication with Bookingham also."

"Well, I really expected to surprise you," the lawyer remarked aloud, "for the fellow never said a word to me in regard to seeing you."

"Ah, my informant was not a fellow."

"No?"

"Oh, no, it was a woman."

"Aha, there are two parties on the scent then."

"So it would seem."

"It is all the better; between the two we may be able to recover the child—I speak of her as a child, although she is a girl of nearly eighteen now. My party wants a good round sum for his trouble—no less than twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Mine is more moderate in her demands. She does not name any particular sum, but is willing to leave it to my generosity."

"My man doesn't do business in that way, for he is a sharper of the sharpeners," and then De Courcy related the full particulars of his interview with the Tombs lawyer.

"Well, I am really inclined to think that my party is decidedly the most reliable," the merchant observed.

And then he related how a middle-aged Irish-woman had waited upon him and told the story of the lost child.

The woman said that she had been an intimate friend of the dame who had brought the child up, and she too related how by accident the child had been found.

As the reader has probably surmised this woman was the Widow O'Flannigan.

After the defeat of the lawyer she had set her wits to work to find the father of the child, and she had gone about the matter in the most novel way in the world.

She had taken into her confidence a newsboy who lived in Shantyville, and the lad with the shrewd cunning common to his tribe had suggested that such a startling episode as the loss of the only child of a prominent New Yorker would be chronicled at full length in the daily newspapers published at the time, and acting on this idea the boy managed to discover the home of the merchant, and then the widow had sought him out.

"Well, between the two of them you certainly ought to be able to recover your child," De Courcy remarked when Mr. Bookingham had finished his recital.

"Yes, but the question is which of the two is it best for us to deal with?" the merchant asked.

"The woman decidedly!" De Courcy replied without an instant's hesitation, "for she claims to be in possession of the girl, while the lawyer only says he can produce her."

"It may be possible, you know, that there are two girls in the case. The one to whom the lawyer refers may not be the same one whom the woman claims to have in her possession, although it would appear from the likeness in their stories that the same girl is referred to by both."

"We can ascertain the truth in regard to the woman's story as soon as you like," Bookingham observed.

"I have her address, and she was really urgent in her desire that I should come and see the girl as soon as possible, and now that I come to think of it, she hinted that there was some one else who wanted to make a 'stake' out of the affair, as she put it."

"At the time I didn't pay any attention to this, in fact, it did not concern me in any way, and it was said in such an ambiguous way that I took no particular notice of it."

"She referred to the lawyer, of course," De Courcy remarked.

"I do not think there is the least doubt in regard to that."

"But your idea about looking into the affair immediately is a good one, and in my opinion the quicker we set out the better."

And the lawyer rose from his chair and seized his hat.

"The old woman strongly urged the necessity for haste, although all the reason I could get out of her was that somebody else was on the watch and might make trouble."

"This lawyer is just the kind of man to get the girl in his hands, and then hold her until we meet his demand," De Courcy observed as they quitted the office.

Five minutes later they were on the L road.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MANY A SLIP 'TWEEN CUP AND LIP.

THANKS to the "rapid transit" of the Elevated Road, the twain reached the upper end of the island in quick time.

"Rather a tough location," De Courcy remarked, as they came within view of the shanty settlement perched high on and amid the rocks.

"Yes, and from the looks of the surroundings I should say it would be a dangerous place after nightfall for men with good clothes on their backs and money in their pockets," the merchant observed.

"I haven't the least doubt of it. Decidedly, unless I was well armed, I should be averse to trusting myself in this dubious locality after dark."

Thanks to the directions given by the widow, the two did not have the least difficulty in finding Mrs. O'Flannigan's grocery store.

Great was the delight of the old woman at finding that the merchant had been so prompt in complying with her request, although she looked rather suspiciously at his companion.

She was afraid that the gentleman had brought a detective with him, and for these bloodhounds of the law she had a decided aversion.

"Yer Honors are as welkin as the flowers in May!" she declared, as she ushered the visitors into the inner apartment and hastened to provide chairs for them.

"Ould man," she said to her satellite, "kape watch outside so that none of the blaggards can come in to disturb these gentlemen."

The old man nodded and took up a position by the outside door.

After he had left the room the widow very carefully closed the door which led from the inner room into the outer apartment.

"Now thin, yer Honors, there's small danger that anybody will hear phat we're afther saying," she remarked, "for there's plenty of spalpeens to the fore that do be allers poking their dirty noses into other people's business."

"Thanks to your precautions, though, there isn't much danger of their interfering this time," Buckingham remarked.

"The blaggards may catch a weasel aslape, but I'll go bail that they will never be able to get the best of Biddy O'Flannigan."

"I have come, you see, as you requested, to examine into the truth of this matter; if your statement is correct and you can restore my child to my arms, the reward I will bestow upon you will be ample to enable you to live in comfort all the rest of your life."

"Shure, I can do it, yer Honor! There isn't the l'aste taste of a lie in phat I say!" the woman declared, positively.

"I have the clothes here that the child wore when she was found."

And the widow went to the closet and procured a small bundle neatly tied up in wrapping-paper.

"It wasn't till me friend was on her death-bed that she was afther letting on to the gurl that she wasn't her own child."

"Thin she tould her the story and warned her for to be careful for to kape these clothes or else she might never be able to find the people she belonged to."

"It was hard wourk for me to persuade the gurl to l'ave me put them away for her, she was so afeard of losing them, but there was a blaggard afther her and she had for to hide for to kape away from him, and as I was afther telling her, she'd find no place any safer for to kape the duds than this shanty."

"An examination of the clothing is of course of the utmost importance," the merchant observed, "for if they are the same that my child wore at the time of her disappearance it will go far to prove that the girl is really what you suppose her to be."

"Oh, there's not the l'aste doubt of it, yer Honor!" the widow declared.

"We can very soon tell," Mr. Buckingham observed.

"This gentleman is my lawyer, and has had full charge of the exhaustive search which has been made for the child and so is perfectly familiar with all the details."

Mrs. O'Flannigan's countenance darkened as she listened to this statement.

She never had a good opinion of the legal lights, and since her encounter with Wimple she fairly detested them.

De Courcy was a keen observer, and the expression upon the face of the woman did not escape him.

"You need not have any apprehension, madam," he hastened to say.

"Although I am a lawyer I am one who would scorn to take any undue advantage of any one."

"To judge from the look upon your face your opinion of lawyers is not a favorable one."

"Indade and it is not!" the woman blurted out.

"I have wan in my eye now—as big a blaggard as iver lived!"

"Not the least doubt that just such men do exist and by their acts bring disgrace upon a noble profession."

"I came in contact with one this very day, a fellow who hangs around the Tombs Police Court, and who came to see me about the case of this child; his name is Wimple."

"I know him—bad 'cess to the dirty blaggard!" the widow exclaimed.

"And was he afther seeing yees about the gurl?"

"Yes, he thought he could make some money out of the affair."

"And phat for should he make a penny out of it, the m'ane scut of the world?" the widow demanded, indignantly.

"Shure, I wint to him, thinking he was a gintleman, and he tr'ated me like I was a baste, bad 'cess to him."

"Did you see him in reference to this affair?" De Courcy asked.

"Yis, sur. He was the gintleman that me fri'nd was afther having attind to the business, and when the gurl kem to me and I thought, mebbe there was a sight for me to make an honest penny out of it, I wint to him for to ax his advice, but the dirty scut wouldn't have anything to do wid me but sed that he would be afther tinding to the thing himself, and thin he follered me up here, thinking that I had the gurl cons'aled in my house."

"That was like him," De Courcy observed.

"Wimple will never be hung for his modesty, that's certain."

"Yis, sur, he walked in here as bould as brass and wid a big policeman at his back."

"And what did you do?"

"Put the pair of them out, bad 'cess to 'em, and thin there was the divil's own ruction for me neighbors kem to me help, and they pelted the pair of th'aves wid stones until they were black and blue."

"Thin the blaggards got a raft of perlicemen and they turned the house upside-down, but they didn't find the gurl, bad 'cess to 'em!"

And the woman chuckled loudly as she reflected how she had managed to baffle the searchers.

During this discourse she had been opening the bundle.

The child's garments contained therein were yellow with age, but otherwise in a good state of preservation.

Both Mr. Buckingham and the lawyer identified the articles immediately.

"Not the least doubt about it," De Courcy asserted. "These are the clothes that the child wore at the time of its disappearance."

"And was there any mark on the weeny wan?" asked Mrs. O'Flannigan, eagerly, for she saw that the hour of triumph was nigh and that a golden reward would soon be hers.

"Yes; a birthmark—three moles about an inch apart forming a perfect triangle on the inner part of the left arm just above the elbow!" exclaimed the merchant, anxiously.

"Oh, she has the moles on her arm, as yees shall see for yerselves!" the widow cried.

"And now, gentlemen, if yees will be afther stepping into the other room, I'll have the gurl here in a twinkling."

The widow was cautious and did not feel disposed to reveal the secret of the hiding-place which she had under the floor to any one.

The pair complied with the request.

Mrs. O'Flannigan saw them safely into the store, closed the door after them, and then ran to the trap-door, which she opened hurriedly.

"Come up, darlint, yer daddy is to the fore, and iverthing is all right," she cried.

But to her surprise no answer was returned. Peering down into the cavity she saw that it was all dark.

"The lantern's out, and phat does that m'ane?" she cried, perplexed by the circumstance.

"There was plinty of oil in the lantern, but mebbe she put it out; and phat for did she do that, I'd like to know?"

"Is she asl'ape?"

To seize upon a handful of matches and descend into the underground apartment was but the work of a moment; but when she arrived at the foot of the stairs and struck a light her surprise was intense.

The underground apartment was empty!

The girl was gone!

For a few moments the woman gazed around her like one stunned by a heavy blow.

This discovery was entirely unexpected, and it was not until the match coming to an end burnt her fingers that she awoke from her stupor.

"Oh, musha!" she exclaimed, as she dropped the first match, struck a second and proceeded to light the lantern.

When this was accomplished and the light illuminated the place she searched for traces of the girl.

How she had been able to get out of the cellar was a mystery.

The trap-door had been secured by a couple of small bolts ever since the girl had been induced to take up her abode in the underground apartment.

There was a small, secret door in one corner of the cellar, which communicated with an underground passage, which led to a small shed in the rear of the house.

This had been arranged so as to afford any fugitive concealed in the cellar a chance to escape, if the officers discovered the existence of the trap-door.

But this door was locked, and as far as the widow could see, had not been opened.

In despair Mrs. O'Flannigan repaired to her visitors.

"She's gone!" she cried, "and the divil a wan of me knows where!"

No explanation could the widow give, and the visitors were forced to depart, not knowing what to make of the woman, and half-inclined to believe that the girl had not really been in the house.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ESCAPE.

AND now we must return to the Lightweight, whom we have neglected too long.

After Daddy Blazes's departure, the prisoner immediately set to work upon the bread and coffee and made a hearty meal.

And all the time he was eating, Hugh was searching the apartment with his eyes, debating where he should find a tool with which to dig a passage through the earth—a tunnel through which he might escape.

"But before I begin operations, I had better take a good survey of the ground, so as to see just how difficult the task is going to be," he murmured as he finished his meal.

Rising, he approached the spot where the old boards concealed the cellar wall.

Rapping on them with his knuckles, he discovered to his surprise that there seemed to be a hollow spot in one place.

Four boards gave back the hollow sound, the rest were solid, showing that they were backed by the wall.

Carefully the prisoner examined these four boards, and then in joy he cried:

"It is a door!"

And so it was; a door with a keyhole, showing that there was a lock to it, but it was built so strongly that the Lightweight with all his strength, could not budge it in the least.

"Behind this door there must be a passage of course, and that passage leads to the outer air," he soliloquized.

"No need for me to tunnel a way out when all I have to do is to open this door and walk out without any difficulty, but the question is how shall I get the door open?"

"I can't pick the lock, for I haven't anything to do it with."

"No use of attempting to smash a way through the wood, for the noise would immediately betray me; how then can the job be worked?"

But as he meditated over the matter, a brilliant idea occurred to him.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, slapping his leg in his exultation, "that's the plan of all plans!"

The idea he had conceived was a bold one, and to a man of his peculiar nature, the bolder the plan, the better it seemed to him.

The idea that had occurred to him was to capture Daddy Blazes the next time the old man made a visit to him.

"In his pocket he will undoubtedly have the keys to both the doors," Hugh mused.

"And then I will have my choice of the two outlets."

"I can either go up the trap or make my way out by means of the secret door."

And now that the scheme was conceived he began to deliberate upon the best means of carrying it out.

"To catch so old a bird as Daddy Blazes off his guard will be no easy task," he muttered.

"One decided advantage I have though. The old man believes that I am securely pinioned by these handcuffs, and of course, cannot have any suspicion that I can slip my hands through them without the slightest trouble."

"The only chance to take him unawares will be by playing possum. The moment I hear him coming I will throw myself on the straw and pretend to be fast asleep."

"Then if he wants to say anything to me he will attempt to wake me, and if he tries that on, or believing that I am asleep turns to depart without disturbing me, he will be deuced lucky if he does not afford me a chance to take him by surprise."

"Let me see! I must provide a bandage for the old man's wrists, and another for his ankles, so that I can truss him up like a turkey ready for roasting."

Slipping his hands out of the "bracelets," he proceeded to make an examination.

He had a stout bandanna handkerchief in his

pocket, and this torn into strips made a cord amply strong to secure a man's wrists.

Around his throat was knotted, sailor fashion, a blue silk neck handkerchief, and this would answer to tie the legs.

Having got these articles in readiness, the Lightweight reclined upon the straw, all in readiness to pretend to be fast asleep the moment he should detect that the old man was approaching.

"He ought to make his appearance somewhere around dinner-time," the captive mused.

"Although it is possible that he will not indulge me with the luxury of three meals.

"In that case he will not make his appearance until supper-time, and that will be a deuced long time to wait."

Slowly the minutes passed away, and half-a-dozen times the prisoner fell into a doze, only to awake with a start, though after some ten or fifteen minutes in slumber's chain.

The life of adventure which he had led had caused him to acquire the faculty of falling asleep almost anywhere without the slightest trouble, and of waking from such slumbers in the easiest possible manner.

Just as his appetite began to give him warning that the noon hour was near at hand, there was a sound in the direction of the trap-door.

Hugh closed his eyes, peeping slyly out of one corner though, and pretended to sleep.

The door opened, and Daddy Blazes cast the light of the lantern down into the apartment, as if desirous of ascertaining where the prisoner was and of learning what he was doing before he descended.

The Lightweight, extended at full length upon the straw heap, was apparently sound asleep.

"Well, well, he is taking it easy," the old man muttered, as he descended the ladder.

In one hand he carried a bowl of coffee, on the top of which was a good-sized chunk of bread, and in the other a knife gleamed, while the lantern was slung from his arm.

As Daddy Blazes came down the stairs the trap closed after him, apparently so arranged that it closed of its own weight.

The old man placed the bread and coffee and the lantern upon the table, then took a couple of steps toward the supposed sleeper as if with the idea of awaking him.

"But what is the use of that?" the old man muttered, as he halted.

"Let the fellow sleep; there isn't anything that I care to say to him."

Then he turned upon his heel.

This was the opportunity for which the captive waited.

He had been compelled to close his eyes tightly when the old man approached, but he judged from the sound of his footsteps what Daddy Blazes was doing, and the moment he turned to depart, with a tiger-like bound he was on his feet and sprung upon him.

The old man was taken completely by surprise, but in spite of that he made a desperate resistance.

But he was like a child in the grasp of the muscular Lightweight.

He attempted to use the knife, but the first move of his assailant had been to pinion the hand which grasped the weapon.

A sudden twist of the wrist and the intense pain compelled Daddy Blazes to drop the knife, and the moment the old man was disarmed, the Lightweight got the crook on him and down the other went.

The prisoner had thrown the old man forward on his face, and almost before Daddy Blazes comprehended what he was about, the Lightweight had tied his hands behind his back with the knotted strips of the handkerchief.

Then he rolled him over on his face and with the silken necktie bound his ankles, so that when the job was completed the old man was helpless.

When Daddy Blazes realized that the other had him at such a terrible disadvantage that resistance was useless, he ceased to struggle and glared in the face of the other with a demoniac expression.

If looks could have killed, Hugh Strong would have been a dead man.

When the task of binding the old man was completed, the Lightweight surveyed him with a complacent look.

"There now, Daddy, I fancy that this arrangement is a great deal more satisfactory to me than the other one," he observed.

"As you will perceive, the boot is on the other leg now. In place of your having me, I've got you."

The old man was amazed; he saw that the captive had succeeded in getting rid of the handcuffs, and how he had managed to accomplish this feat was a most decided mystery.

"Well, I suppose you have got rather the best of it at present," Daddy Blazes was forced to admit.

"Yes; it seems to me as if I had the advantage just now, but turn about is only fair play, you know, and as you, when you had me foul, 'went through' me, now you ought not to complain if I see what treasures you have on your person."

But the old man did not relish this idea at all, and remonstrated strongly against it.

"You scoundrel, would you rob me?" he cried, white with anger at the idea.

"Oh, no, no, not at all; and that is an ugly word to use, too," the other replied.

"You didn't think it was robbing, did you, when you took advantage of my insensible condition to clean me out?"

"I know nothing about it," Daddy Blazes growled.

"Certainly not; you left the door open and some other rascal searched me, eh?"

And with this sarcastic remark the Lightweight knelt down by the side of the old man and proceeded to inspect his pockets.

As he had expected he found a bunch of keys and in the bunch were a couple of the delicate tools, dear to the cracksman's heart, known as skeleton-keys.

There was also a wallet containing a good round sum of money, but no private papers of any kind.

This was what the Lightweight chiefly hoped to find, and he was disappointed at not coming across anything that would give him a clew to the secret plans of the old man.

Thanks to the bunch of keys, though, he would be able to get out of the den.

He had been revolving a plan of operations in his mind while engaged in searching the old man, and by the time the operation was completed he had decided what to do.

He had recovered his revolvers and so was prepared for war again.

Rising to his feet, he addressed Daddy Blazes:

"Now, then, old man, I want a little information from you."

"You will not get it!" Daddy Blazes cried, doggedly. "Not a blamed bit, so you can spare your breath."

And the old man shut his teeth together in grim determination.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SECRET PASSAGE.

HUGH STRONG laughed outright at the reply made by the old man, for it was exactly what he had expected.

"Oh, well, I will try to get on without it," he remarked.

"I suppose that there isn't any use of looking for Black Bud in the house now, for by this time he is out of danger."

"You are right, there!" Daddy Blazes exclaimed. "The cracksman is no fool to linger here with the police hot on the scent."

"What does this door here lead to, by the way?" asked the Firefly abruptly, pointing to the secret door.

An ugly look came into the old man's eyes; he was evidently surprised by the knowledge of the other, but he affected ignorance, shaking his head and saying:

"I don't know anything about any door. There is only one way of getting into the cellar that I know of and that is by the way of the trap."

"I will have to show you, then, some things about your shanty that you don't know, although I reckon that would be a difficult matter."

"When I come to try these keys in the lock though, I shouldn't be surprised to find that some one of them will fit."

"One of the skeletons will be sure to, anyway."

The Lightweight approached the secret door, and the old man gave utterance to a bitter imprecation.

"You scoundrel!" he cried. "I will have your life for this one of these days."

"You don't like me to penetrate into the secrets of your prison-house, eh?" Hugh remarked, mockingly.

"But it is just what I am going to do though, and you can't help yourself."

As Hugh had surmised, one of the keys did fit the lock and opened the door without any trouble.

A narrow passage about two feet wide by six high stood revealed.

It was easy enough to guess why such a passage had been constructed.

In case of a man with the officers in hot pursuit, while the police were forcing their way into the shanty it would be the easiest thing in the world for him to escape by means of this underground way, and the police would never be able to account for the man eluding them.

"Now, then, I will explore this passage and see where it goes to, and then I will come back and take a look up-stairs, for I've an idea that you have some secret hiding-places which in an ordinary search would be apt to be overlooked."

Daddy Blazes gnashed his teeth with rage at this declaration.

"Oh, you vile scoundrel! I will have your life for this!" he cried.

"So you say, but I haven't confidence enough in your word to believe you," Hugh rejoined.

"I've got you foul this time, Daddy Blazes, and I should be a fool if I did not improve my advantage."

"This passage is dark so I'll trouble you for the loan of your lantern that I may be able to see what I am about."

"You will not mind being left alone in the dark to accommodate me, I know," the Lightweight continued.

"It is not particularly disagreeable when you get used to it. You see I have had experience, so I know what I am talking about."

The old man was being paid off in his own coin, but he was in the toils, and he was obliged to content himself with cursing the ill-luck which had given the stranger such an advantage.

"Oh, what a fool I was that I didn't kill the scoundrel outright when I had him helpless in my power!" he exclaimed.

"As it is, the mercy that I had upon him will be apt to prove my destruction, but if I escape from this trap I will be wiser next time."

Leaving the old man to his bitter reflections we will follow the footsteps of the Lightweight bent upon exploring the secret passage.

"The inspector said that I would find this settlement to be a tough one and full of rascals of every grade, but even he, with all his knowledge, was not up to this sort of thing," Hugh soliloquized, as he advanced along the narrow passage.

The way went straight along for about fifty feet and then turned abruptly to the right.

"I must be near the end now," the Lightweight observed as he turned the corner.

Ten feet further on and the passage ran into another one, and there ended.

The new passage was only about ten feet long; at one end a wooden barrier, which Hugh imagined to be a door, blocked the way, and at the other the passage came to an abrupt end, in a dirt wall.

"Now what the deuce does this mean?" asked the Lightweight, as he stood in the middle of the passage and flashed the light of the lantern first one way and then the other.

"The door there evidently is the mode of egress to the air, but why on earth was this blind passage made?"

"Possibly the fellows who did the work made a mistake in their calculations and started in the wrong direction and dug just so far, before they discovered their error," he surmised.

"It must have been something of that kind of course, for the fellows who did this work were not the kind of men to waste their labor."

"And now the question before the meeting is, which one of these keys fits the lock of this door. I assume that the door has a lock, of course, although it may be fastened with a spring, worked by some concealed catch."

Advancing to the door, he proceeded to examine it by the aid of the lantern's light.

As he had expected; there was a keyhole, but when he came to try the keys attached to the bunch, not one of them would fit it.

"I will have to try and see if the small skeleton-key will pick the lock," he said at last.

"Mighty strange though," he continued, "that there was a key on the bunch to fit the first door and yet none for this second."

"There is a mystery about this that I don't exactly understand."

The skeleton-key did the business though.

Inserted in the lock, on the second trial, it forced back the bolt.

The door opened, and Hugh Strong found himself face to face with the girl whom he had protected from the rage of her brutal uncle.

The recognition was mutual, and an exclamation of astonishment broke from the lips of both.

"Well, upon my word, Miss McGinnis, I am surprised!" the Lightweight exclaimed.

"You are about the last person that I expected to see in such a place as this."

"And you, sir, like a guardian angel have come a second time to my rescue!" the girl cried, while tears of gratitude stood in her brilliant eyes.

"But what on earth are you doing here?" and as he put the question our hero peered curiously over the shoulder of the girl into the apartment beyond, with the idea of ascertaining what sort of a place it was.

"I came here to seek shelter from an enemy who was pursuing me, but I fear that I have fallen into the hands of one who is no friend to me."

"Why, it looks like a regular dungeon."

"It is a cellar under Mrs. O'Flannigan's house; she keeps a little grocery store, and she used to be a great friend of my mother, so when I found I was in danger I came to her, thinking that for the sake of the old-time friendship she would aid me."

"Friendship is a very uncertain thing in this world sometimes, and it is not always safe to trust to it."

"Often instead of proving a staff upon which one may lean in confidence, it breaks under the burden like a rotten reed."

"I fear that it is so in this case," the girl remarked, sadly.

"As it is, I know not what to do, or where to go."

"I was pursued and I needed shelter. I

knew that this was an out-of-the-way spot, and I thought I might find concealment here.

"Mrs. O'Flannigan received me in the most friendly manner, but I fear now that her apparent friendship and warm greeting were but lures to entrap me into her power.

"Duped by her manner I was induced to reveal to her more of my history than I should have done, and now that I have had time to reflect upon the matter I am afraid she resolved to traffic on her knowledge."

"Very likely; the world is full of people who will play that game whenever they get a chance," Hugh observed.

"This cellar is a secret one, and access to it is gained by a hidden trap-door, and when Mrs. O'Flannigan explained to me that when I was once down here I would be safe from all pursuit I was delighted and accepted her offer to hide me here with thanks."

"I can understand that under the circumstances."

"But since I have been shut up here I have been reflecting deeply," the girl continued. "I find that I am really a prisoner, for I have tried to move the trap-door and have discovered that I cannot, and then the solitude, too, has produced such an effect upon me that I am sure I shall lose my reason if I am compelled to stay here."

"Very likely; the convict confined in a State Prison is in a palace compared to this," the Lightweight observed.

"And then, when I came here I had no idea of what a dreadful place it was."

"Why, this morning, only a little while ago, there was the most dreadful fight going on outside; the noise even penetrated into this place."

"And when Mrs. O'Flannigan brought me my dinner I asked her about it, but she made light of the matter, saying that she guessed it was only some of the boys in the neighborhood playing their games."

"But I could see by her face that she was not telling me the truth, for it was a regular fierce fight, and half an hour or so after the noise ended there was a heavy tramp of feet up-stairs as though an army were in possession of the place."

"I told Mrs. O'Flannigan that I did not think I could bear to stay any longer and that when night came I thought I would go away, but she wouldn't listen to the idea, and said I would soon grow accustomed to it, and in short, I am sure I am imprisoned here just as if I was in a jail."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SURPRISE.

THE amateur detective reflected upon the matter for a moment.

"Do you suppose that the old woman imagines that she can make any money by keeping you here?" he asked.

"I am afraid so, for she hinted as much. She said it would be money in both of our pockets if I would only be content to stay here."

"And when I asked her to explain how that could be, she shook her head and said that there were some things that ought not to be talked of until the proper time came, and as far as I was concerned it hadn't come yet."

"Then she advised me to be a good girl and to try and make myself satisfied to stay in this terrible place for a little while, and then she went away, and I listened and heard her move the bolts which fasten the trap-door."

"Oh, the old woman has made you a prisoner here, there isn't any mistake about that," Hugh observed.

"I have been through a little adventure in that line myself, and it is only by an accident that I find myself here."

"When I opened this door I supposed it led to a passage through which I could gain the street, and I had no idea that I was going into another cellar."

"Oh, you have not come from the street then?"

"No, I am doing a little in the escaping line myself."

"I got into a scrape, luck went against me, and I was shut up in just such another cellar as this one, but I managed to get out and was trying to find my way to the open air again, but the passage conducted me here; but there must be some door along the passage somewhere, for this underground way was never dug merely to communicate from cellar to cellar."

"I must take a look at the other end of the passage. I thought it ended in a dirt-wall hut, but that may be only a blind to hide the entrance."

A close examination proved this surmise to be correct.

The dirt-wall turned out to be a door, skillfully painted, and one of the keys of the bunch fitting in the lock soon opened the portal.

Then a flight of small steps stood revealed, and these led to a trap-door in the ceiling.

"Aha! light at last!" the Lightweight exclaimed, after making this discovery.

"Now then we will not have any difficulty in making our escape!"

But hardly had the words quitted his lips when he noticed that there was a key-hole in

the trap-door, and the question at once came up would any one of his keys fit it?

If not, all the fat would be in the fire, for the door was an extremely solid one, and if it could not be unlocked it would surely be a terrible job to force it open.

But one of the keys of the bunch did fit, as Hugh had expected, and the Lightweight, lifting up the trap-door, made the discovery that the trap was in the floor of an old shed, which had evidently at one time been used for a stable.

It was quite dark for there were no windows in it and only one small door.

It was a one-story affair—a regular shanty, like all the rest of the buildings in the settlement, which did not boast of a single regularly-built house.

"We are all right now," Hugh observed. "We can get out of this place easily enough for it is only a shell, and even if I haven't any key to unlock the door, which seems to be securely fastened, we can get out through the side of the building."

"But now I'll go back and lock that door again so that the dame who so kindly locked you up will be at a loss to know what has become of you when she goes to look for you and finds you among the missing, and by so doing I will be able to baffle pursuit."

The girl thought that this was an excellent idea, and so expressed herself.

It did not take the adventurer many minutes to carry out the project, and then he returned to the shed.

"Now then," he said, as he ascended the steps and carefully closed the trap-door after it, "the first thing to be done is to take a look at the surroundings and see what chance there is to get out of this place without attracting observation."

"We must not be seen departing if we can help it, for this settlement has the toughest gang of roughs in it that exist in all New York."

"I have been told that it is as much as the life of a policeman is worth to attempt to make any arrest, and that in fact any less force than half a dozen officers don't stand much chance against the mob that the sight of a blue-coat will raise in this locality."

"What a dreadful place it must be!" exclaimed the girl, with a shiver.

"And how very stupid it was of me to seek shelter in such a place."

"Yes, you jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire most decidedly when you came to this miserable hole."

There were cracks in all the walls of the shed, the boards having been warped by the heat of the sun, so that it was an easy matter for the young man to command a view in all directions.

But before looking to ascertain if the coast was clear Hugh tried to see if he had a key to fit the lock.

The second one proved to be a fit, and the Lightweight laughed as he reflected how well the bunch of keys of which he had despoiled Daddy Blazes had served his purpose.

"The old rascal will be apt to die of strangulation, for I've no doubt that by this time he has cursed his ill-luck until he is black in the face," Hugh mused to himself, as he tried the keys in the lock.

"Now then, I'll see the girl safely out of this den of rattlesnakes, and after that is accomplished I will come back and 'go through' Daddy Blazes's house in the most scientific manner—go through it in a way that the old man will despise, and the chances are good, I think, that I will be able to make important discoveries."

A cautious cry of alarm from the girl at this point interrupted the Lightweight's calculations.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

While he had been busy with the lock, the natural curiosity of the girl impelled her to look through one of the cracks in the wall.

"There is a man outside seated upon a rock about a hundred feet away, who seems to be keeping a watch on this shed."

"It is probably purely accidental, for it is utterly impossible for any one to know that there is anybody in it."

The shed was isolated from the rest of the settlement, the only house near it being the shanty of Mrs. O'Flannigan, which was about twenty feet distant.

The Lightweight hastened to the girl's side, and took a look through the crack at the man.

He was an ugly, beetle-browed fellow, a regular tramp in appearance, and from the way in which he sat, with his eyes fixed upon the shed, it certainly looked as if he was engaged in watching the premises.

Hugh glanced around him perplexed.

"Well, upon my life, I don't understand it," he remarked.

"The fellow is watching the shed, and there isn't any two ways about it, but what on earth he is doing it for is a mystery, for there isn't anything in the shed or about it, as far as I can see, to call for any watching."

The girl nodded her head as much as to say that she agreed with this opinion.

"But as he is only watching the back of the shed, and we calculate to leave by the front door, I don't think he will bother us much."

"That is true," the girl observed.

Then Hugh went to the front of the house and took a look through one of the cracks, while the girl pursued a similar course at the side of the house.

A simultaneous cry of alarm came from both of them.

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed the girl; "there is a man watching on this side of the house too!"

"So there is on this side," the Lightweight responded.

And then he hastened to the side of the house opposite to where the girl stood, and applied his eye to one of the cracks.

She understood what he was about, and watched his movements with intense interest.

"Just as I expected," Hugh remarked.

"There is a watcher there also?"

"Yes."

"Why the place is watched on all sides!"

"Well, I must say it looks like it."

"What does it mean?" and the girl's lips trembled as she put the question, for by the earnest expression which had appeared on the face of her companion at these last discoveries, she understood that he regarded their position as a critical one.

"Well, I don't exactly know; I must admit I am at a loss to understand it," the Lightweight replied slowly.

"These four men are keeping watch on this shed, and they have posted themselves so that it will be impossible for any one to leave the place without their knowledge."

"They seem just like sentries," the girl observed.

"That is just what they are, put there to give warning of any attempt on our part to escape from this place."

"And should we attempt to do it, their warning cries will instantly rouse the whole settlement, just as the slogan of an enraged bee excites all the rest."

"Oh, how dreadful!" cried the maid, with clasped hands.

"Yes, and these miserable wretches would think nothing of tearing us to pieces if the word so to do was given by their leaders."

"But how is it possible for any one to know that there is anybody in this place?"

"That is the mystery which puzzles me," the Lightweight replied, thoughtfully.

"There is only one explanation as far as I can see. My man from whom I escaped must have got rid of his bonds in some way and has given the alarm."

"What is to be done?"

"We can do nothing but wait."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE OLD MAN'S PLAN.

"WAIT—wait?" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes, that is all we can do at present," Hugh replied.

"With these fellows on guard it will be clearly impossible for us to escape from this place without attracting attention, and from what I know of this locality and its inhabitants I am satisfied that the moment we were seen an alarm would be given, and the wretches who would come in obedience to the call would think nothing of tearing us all to pieces."

A shudder shook the frame of the girl as she listened to the blunt avowal, but in such a case as this the Lightweight did not believe it was wise to conceal the truth.

"By waiting without attempting to escape our position does not become any worse, and in time some chance may arise that will afford us an opportunity to get out of this hobble."

"As long as we are sheltered by this shed we are tolerably safe, for I am well armed, have plenty of ammunition, and am in a position to make it pretty warm for the gang if they should try to force an entrance into this place, for I should not hesitate to use my weapons, knowing as I do that I could not hope for any mercy at their hands if they once succeeded in getting me in their clutches."

"It does not seem possible that such a thing as this could happen right in New York City," the girl observed.

"It is more like a story of the Wild West—an incident of the borders—beyond the influence of civilization."

"That is very true in the abstract, but not so in reality," Hugh replied.

"Anybody who is well acquainted with the great city as it really is, will tell you that there are as great savages to be found within its limits—men and women as barbarous in their instincts and as merciless to foes within their power as any red-skins who ever roamed the Western plains."

"Upon my life I believe I would rather run my chances with a lot of savages than encounter these wretches; they are just as barbarous as the Indians, and decidedly more cunning in their devilry."

"Yes, yes, I believe you are right," the girl observed.

"I am pretty sure I am. I have traveled a great deal in my time and come in contact with

quite a number of different races of wild men, and I must say my experience has been that wild men who are to be found in the very heart of all great cities are far more to be dreaded than their uncivilized brothers, the denizens of the wilderness.

And now leaving the pair to watch and wait, we will explain how it came about that the sentinels were posted to guard the old shed and so prevent the fugitives from escaping.

When the young man had overcome Daddy Blazes and bound him hand and foot, he fancied that he had made a tolerably good job of it and that the old man was so secured that he would remain a prisoner until some one came to his rescue.

But the Lightweight had committed the common error of underrating his antagonist.

Daddy Blazes was an abler man than Hugh Strong suspected.

The moment that the young man disappeared through the secret door Daddy Blazes set out to free himself from the bonds that hampered him.

First he essayed to burst his fetters by main strength, but after a few moments of violent exertion he became satisfied that he was not equal to the task.

Then a brilliant idea occurred to him as he surveyed the cloth strips which fettered him.

A wild animal would speedily gnaw its way through such bonds, and why could he not do the same?

The thought was a good one, and he at once proceeded to carry the project into execution.

The old man possessed a good set of teeth, and soon the tightly-knotted bonds began to give way.

It did not take long for him to release his hands, and then the rest was easy, for after his hands were free it was not a difficult job to remove the bonds that confined his ankles.

He rose to his feet a free man once again.

It had only taken him about five minutes to accomplish this, and that was all the start that the fugitive had.

"It will take him some time to find his way out, and the chance is good that I can intercept him," Daddy Blazes cried in malicious glee, as he ran to the stairway and began to ascend.

Although the cellar was plunged in darkness by the removal of the lantern which Hugh Strong had carried off with him, yet from long acquaintance with the place the old man had no difficulty in finding his way.

The secret spring which fastened the trap yielded readily to the touch of his experienced fingers.

He gained the main floor and then hurried from the house to a neighboring shanty which served as a sort of headquarters for the members of the gang.

There were five of the ruffians there when the old man entered playing cards and drinking beer.

Briefly the old man explained what he wanted.

"There is a police spy in the old shed, who will be apt to attempt to escape the moment he gets a good chance," he said.

"But as he is in possession of some important secrets, he must not be allowed to get out of the settlement alive," he continued.

There was an ominous growl from the lips of the ruffians at this, and one and all began to hunt for their weapons.

"We want to do the trick quietly, you know," Daddy Blazes continued.

"It may be possible that the police are somewhere in the neighborhood, and we mustn't alarm them if we can help it."

The ruffians shook their heads and scowled; all of them had been in the fight when the Tombs lawyer and his police escort had been handled so roughly, and that skirmish had whetted their appetite so that they were quite ready for more fun in the same line.

"Four of you watch the shed," Daddy Blazes continued.

"Surround it on all sides so that it will be impossible for this cursed spy to get out without being seen, and the other one rouse up the boy so that we will be ready for this rat when the time comes to hunt him out of his hole."

The ruffians deserted their cards and beer and hastened immediately to carry out the orders of the old man.

And so it happened that when the fugitives looked through the cracks in the old shed, they found the place surrounded by watchers on all sides.

The delay of the Lightweight, caused by his encounter with the girl, had given time to the sentinels to assume their positions.

But now that Daddy Blazes had cut off the escape of the spy, he was somewhat at a loss to know what move it would be best to make next.

The spy was entrapped and yet he was not.

True, the shed was surrounded, but the daring adventurer who had been bold enough to penetrate into the heart of Shantyville alone—single-handed, and beard Daddy Blazes in his den, possessed both his liberty and his weapons, and from the experience that the chief of the outlaw settlement already had of the intruder,

he felt sure that the spy would not hesitate to use his arms if he was attacked, and the chances were good that if an attempt was made to capture him in his lair, he would make a most desperate resistance.

He had the advantage of the shelter of the shed, and it was plain it would require a desperate struggle to dislodge him.

Daddy Blazes pondered this matter over in his mind while waiting for the gang to assemble.

He had sent out word for the men to come quietly to the shanty, dropping into it one by one so as not to attract attention.

The shanty where the men had been directed to assemble, although only about a hundred feet from the shed which sheltered the fugitives, was hidden from it by a huge mass of rock cropping out of the earth, so that the gathering of the "warriors" could not be discovered by the man whom they designed to attack.

Daddy Blazes was a firm believer in the wise saying of the ancient Greek:

"When the lion's skin falls short eke it out with the fox's."

In this case the lion's skin was most decidedly short.

He did not dare to venture to storm the citadel occupied by the spy although his force was twenty to one.

He felt that the adventurer would offer a desperate resistance, and such a struggle would be apt to cost the lives of half a dozen of his men; that is, if they had courage enough to continue the fight after discovering what a particularly warm reception the besieged had in store for them.

And on this point Daddy Blazes felt extremely doubtful.

That the gang, rendered confident by their number, would assail the shed and endeavor to get the adventurer out of it, the old man felt sure, but that they would persist in the attack if the spy showed vigorous fight he was not so certain.

Strategy must be used.

So after the gang were assembled the old man explained his plan to them.

"Boys, I want you to quietly sneak out and surround the shed on all sides, being careful, you know, to keep out of sight."

"Be sure that you don't let this cursed spy get his eyes on any of you, for if you do the game is up."

"The fellow is armed, of course, and when he finds that he is cornered will be apt to make a desperate fight."

"Now, it will not do for us to let the spy get off with whole bones, for he is the only man that ever succeeded in penetrating into our stronghold, and we must make an example of him."

"Yes, yes!" cried the rest in chorus. "Kill him!"

"Well, if we do not kill him, we must do him up so that he will never dare to trouble us again."

"Now be off, boys, to your holes, and when you hear me yell go for your man."

The gang obeyed the injunction, and when the coast was clear Daddy Blazes came forth.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A PARLEY.

HUGH STRONG was looking through one of the cracks of the front wall of the shanty when Daddy Blazes made his appearance around the corner of the rock which had previously concealed him from sight.

"Oho! the cat is out of the bag now!" exclaimed the Lightweight, the moment he caught sight of the old man.

"This explains the mystery."

The girl had hastened to his side the moment he spoke.

"It is the old scoundrel who had melocked up in the cellar," the young man said.

He had previously given the girl a brief account of his adventures, not going deeply though into the why and wherefore of his visit to Daddy Blazes's stronghold; merely stating that he was in search of information.

"I thought I had tied him so that he would stay tied for some time."

"In fact, I calculated to go back there as soon as I explored these passages, but the old rascal has been too smart for me."

"I can understand now though about these men being placed on the watch."

"The old scoundrel expected that I would attempt to escape by the way of this shed, and he means to head me off."

"He is coming toward us," the girl observed.

"Yes; what is he up to?" Hugh remarked, reflectively.

"He must suspect that I am here or else he would not have posted his sentinels to cut off my retreat."

"Of course he has no idea that you are here."

"Perhaps he wishes to avoid a difficulty and comes to make some proposal to you," the girl suggested.

"I should not be surprised if you have hit upon the truth," the Lightweight replied.

"The fact is that so long as I am inside this shed I am not in so tight a place as one would imagine."

"I cannot very well get out, but neither can my foes get in, so long as my weapons remain in working order and I have plenty of ammunition."

"It is possible that the aged rascal has reflected upon this point, he is a long-headed old scoundrel, and he has come to the conclusion before resorting to force of arms to try what his tongue will do."

Daddy Blazes came straight to the shed, but halted when he was within about twenty feet of it.

In obedience to Hugh's instructions the girl had retreated to the opposite side of the shed so as to keep watch there against a surprise while the young man conversed with Daddy Blazes.

As will be seen by this the Lightweight did not put much faith in the old man.

As we have said Daddy Blazes came to a halt about twenty feet from the house, sat down upon a rock, and pitching his voice so it would just about reach to the shed, said:

"Well, young man, are you there?"

"Yes, I'm here, all of me," Hugh answered, immediately.

"You thought you had me in a pretty tight place a while ago," Daddy Blazes observed, with a chuckle, "but, as you see, I have got out of it."

"Yes, yes; there's an old saying that Satan always stands by his own," Hugh rejoined.

"And you, my adventuring young friend, you are in a pretty tight place now."

"I don't really see how you make that out," the Lightweight replied, immediately.

"Ah, yes, that's right!" and the old man nodded, approvingly.

"That is the right way to talk. Never admit that you are in a tight place. Bluster and brag has won many a battle since this world began, and will win many in the future."

"But you are in a pretty bad sort of a hole here for all that."

"You really must allow me to differ with you. Why, don't you know that you are surrounded by my gang, and that all I have to do is to give the signal of alarm and the toughest crowd that there is in all this big city will go for you?"

"Oh, bosh!" cried the Lightweight, contemptuously. "Your tough crowd is a set of cowardly cut-throats, who would run like rabbits if they found themselves opposed by anything like an equal force."

"I am armed—well armed, and I am not at all afraid to use my weapons, and thanks to the protection afforded by the walls of this shed, I can bid defiance to a small army."

"Yes, yes, you crow loud now; but when my gang make their rush I fancy you will be apt to change your tune."

"If you believe that why don't you try it on?" the other asked.

"Oh, come now; I am really not as bad as you think me!" Daddy Blazes exclaimed.

"No doubt you suppose I am eager and anxious to shed your blood, but it isn't so, although you are the best man that ever got after me, but now this little affair is ended as far as I am concerned."

"Black Bud is off, and with the start he has the chances are a hundred to one against his being caught."

"John is an old friend of mine, and if I am noted for any one thing in this world it is for sticking to my friends when they get into trouble."

"A very good trait indeed," the Lightweight remarked.

"Oh, yes, as I told you, I am a pretty decent sort of fellow when you come to know me, although some folks do give me a hard name."

"It is the fate of man to be misunderstood and reviled," Hugh remarked, philosophically.

"Well, to come to the point at once without further waste of words, if I understand your game, Black Bud was the man you was after."

"Yes, you are right there."

"I suppose you understand by this time that Black Bud is no fool, and is not the kind of man to stop fooling around in New York after so close a call as he got last night."

"I should imagine that it was his policy to get out, unless he has some other hiding-place which he considers to be secure from discovery."

"There isn't such another den as mine in the city!" the old man declared.

"And you can bet your life that after you was smart enough to catch on to his hiding-place he wasn't idiot enough to fool around New York, after he succeeded in getting away from you."

"He has a good start, and by this time he is so far away that neither you nor any other spy stands any chance to catch him."

"Well, that is a good thing for Black Bud, I should remark."

"Now then, I hope you understand that all the interest I had in this matter was to help a friend out of a bad scrape, and that job being accomplished I am ready to wash my hands of the whole affair."

"Yes, I see—very natural under the circumstances."

"Now, I don't bear you any ill will on account of the little difficulty that we had, and I hope that you haven't any hard feelings against me."

"Oh, no, none at all," the Lightweight replied.

"And as far as I am concerned I am willing to cry quits."

"A very laudable spirit, I am sure," Hugh responded, with a slight touch of sarcasm perceptible in his voice.

"You got the best of it at the first, then you succeeded in turning the tables, but now again the advantage is on my side, but I do not feel at all disposed to take advantage of it."

"Well, I am very much obliged of course, although I must say I don't think you have got so much the best of it just now, as you seem to imagine."

"Oh, I don't blame you for putting the best possible face on the matter, but you are in a tight place for all that, and what you think is of no consequence; your opinion cannot change the facts in the case."

"But now what I was going to say was this: I am satisfied if you are, and if you have a mind to call the thing square and give me your word that I shall not be bothered by the police for the share I had in aiding John Buddock to escape, you are free to depart."

"I suppose you think you are making me a pretty liberal offer?" Hugh remarked.

"Most certainly I do."

"You think you have me in a trap from which it will be impossible for me to escape?"

"I don't think anything about it," the old man exclaimed.

"I know that you are in a trap from which it will be impossible for you to escape."

"You are surrounded by my gang on all sides, and if they once go for you, you will be a lucky man to escape with your life; anyway you will get a beating that will lay you up so that you will not be any good to yourself or any one else for six months at least."

"Oh, no, no, not at all," the Lightweight exclaimed.

"You are not stating the case fairly."

"You have me surrounded; that is true enough I can readily believe, but if I can't get out neither can your gang get in."

"I am fully armed and shall not hesitate to use my weapons if I am attacked, and if your ruffians dare to attack me here, they will be apt to pay dearly for their rashness."

"Oh, there isn't any use to talk to such a blind fool as you are," Daddy Blazes exclaimed in a rage.

"You want to be killed; that is plain enough!"

"No I don't. I am just as careful of my precious person as any man you can find on top of the footstool, and that is why I don't feel any disposition to walk into this trap which you have laid so cunningly."

"Don't try to play me for a fool, Daddy Blazes, for you will only have your trouble for your pains."

"You are anxious to get me out of this house because you know I will handle your men so roughly, if they dare to attack me here, that they will soon be sick of the job."

"Your game is to get me out of this, and then your cut-throats will be able to get a chance at me, but I see your trick and it will not work."

Daddy Blazes rose to his feet, his face convulsed with rage.

"You will have it," he cried, "you will not be warned."

"I will not be tricked!" Hugh retorted.

"Your blood be on your own head then! I'll have you out of that, and without giving you a chance to strike a blow too."

"I will either explode a mine under you and blow the shed to atoms, or else I will set it on fire and roast you alive!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ATTACK.

THE threat was a terrible one, but it did not frighten our hero in the least.

On the contrary he uttered a scornful laugh.

"Aha!" he cried, "you don't feel so sure of your game as you pretend, or else you wouldn't waste your time in idle threats."

"You cannot come any mine business, for the moment that you or any of your gang tried to get at me by way of the underground passage I would be after you and put a speedy stop to it."

"As to fire, I hardly think you will dare to try that either, for such a thing would be apt to attract the attention of the police, and it isn't your game to do that."

"It will be easy to get a rifle, though, and shoot you down like a rat in a cage without your being able to offer any resistance!" Daddy Blazes snarled.

"Oh, no, you can't!" replied the Lightweight, decidedly. "You forget the underground passage. What is there to prevent me from taking refuge there the moment you open fire? And it will be an utter impossi-

bility for your bullets to harm me when I am thus protected."

"We will see—we will see!" exclaimed the old man, and then he disappeared behind the rock.

The girl had listened to the conversation with the greatest attention.

"Do you think he will attempt to carry out his threats?" she asked, earnestly.

"He will certainly try to damage me in some way," the young man replied.

"But the exact way in which the attack will be made is of course a mystery. The old wretch is puzzled how to get at me, or else he never would have taken the trouble to hold a parley."

"As I told him, the situation is a peculiar one. I cannot get out without giving them a chance to go for me, neither can they get in unless they see fit to risk the lives of some of their men, and these city roughs are, as a rule, too cowardly to attack unless all the advantage is on their side."

"And then in this case it will not do for them to make too much noise, or else the attention of the police will be attracted, and if that should happen the game would be up as far as they are concerned."

The Lightweight was right in his calculations.

Daddy Blazes was in a quandary in regard to the matter, and hardly knew how to proceed.

But the more he considered the matter, the more likely it appeared to him that all operations tending to the dislodging of the foe who had intrenched himself right in the heart of the squatter settlement, must be postponed until the shades of night lowered upon the earth.

Then it would be possible to approach near enough to the shed to set it on fire without exposing the incendiary to the danger of getting a bullet in his body.

After taking time to reflect upon the subject and weighing the matter in his mind, he had come to the conclusion that the best way to force the intruder from his fortification was to set fire to the shed.

True, there was the danger that the flames might attract the attention of the police, but as there were huge bonfires kindled amid the rocks every now and then by the gamins of the neighborhood, the chances were great that the police, if they noticed the flames at all, would ascribe them to some such cause.

Then, too, if any of the members of "the finest" came to the conclusion that one of the shanties was on fire the odds were big that they wouldn't trouble their heads about the matter, for there wasn't a policeman on duty in the district who wouldn't have considered it a matter for rejoicing if the whole entire shanty settlement had burnt to the ground, for Shantyville and its outcast inhabitants gave them more trouble than all the rest of the district put together.

Time wore away and neither of the parties concerned in this strange proceeding made a move.

Daddy Blazes had concluded to wait until nightfall before he attempted to set the shed on fire—a conclusion to which he had been forced by circumstances, for he knew it would not be possible for him to fire the place during the daylight, for the spy would never permit such a thing to be done, and, on his part, the Lightweight judged that he would stand a much better chance of escaping after the shades of night had covered the earth.

He knew the place was surrounded and he had determined the moment darkness came on sufficiently strong to conceal surrounding objects to make a bold dash through the line of foes that encircled him.

The girl was to remain in the house until he had drawn the attention of all the watchers upon himself and then it would be an easy matter for her to slip out and escape under cover of the darkness.

Gradually the night came on.

The sun had set in all its golden splendor, the gloom began to thicken and the street-lights of the great city to twinkle like so many stars whose mission it was to illumine the dusky shadows of the night.

Hugh Strong watched eagerly for the gathering of the darkening shadows.

The favorable moment came at last.

The gloom had become so thick that none of the surrounding objects could be seen.

The Lightweight had not been idle during the brief time when the evening shadows had been gathering.

He had discovered a loose board in the back wall of the shed and had quietly pried it from its uncertain fastenings so that it hung by a single nail at the top only and he could easily push it to one side so as to pass through the opening thus made.

Hugh reasoned that the gang would be certain to look for him to escape by way of the door, and that the watch upon that point would be more careful than anywhere else.

His last instructions to the girl were briefly given.

"No one suspects that you are here, and therefore you will not be looked for," he said. "My escape will be pretty certain to be discovered before I have gone fifty feet from the building if the scoundrels keep a careful watch."

"And the moment I am discovered they will go for me of course, and that must be the signal for you to leave the building."

"When you get outside wait for a moment and note the direction from whence the noise of the pistol-shots comes, and then you go in the opposite direction."

"Of course the moment I am discovered all the gang will hasten to cut me off, and that will give you a chance to escape without attracting any notice."

"Now, good-by and God bless you!"

A fervent grasp of hands and then the Lightweight pushed the board to one side and stepped noiselessly through the opening.

He had previously arranged a meeting-place with the girl so that they could come together again after this peril was past, if they both succeeded in escaping, and of this our hero had no doubt.

On the outside of the shed the Lightweight hesitated and strained his eyes to see if he could distinguish any watcher in the distance.

He listened, too, thinking that it was possible that some careless movement might reveal to him the whereabouts of the sentinel.

The sailor life of the Lightweight had trained both eyes and ears so that in both senses he was far superior to the average man, but for all that no signs of human presence could he discover.

Crouching close to the earth he advanced cautiously in the direction of the nearest shanty, from the windows of which a light was gleaming, and which was about a hundred yards away.

Fully fifty feet he went without discovering the slightest sign indicating the presence of a foe, and was just about to congratulate himself upon his good luck in evading the sentinel, when he stumbled over the fellow, who, all curled up in a heap on the ground, was enjoying a quiet doze.

The rough proved to be active enough, though, when thus rudely awakened from his slumber.

The man had disposed himself in such a fashion, braced against a rock, that in the darkness he had appeared like a part of the rock and had even deceived the keen eyes of the Lightweight.

The moment he was disturbed by Hugh he set up a cry of alarm and grappled with the intruder upon his slumbers, although our hero did his best to get the fellow by the throat so as to choke his utterance.

But owing to the manner in which he fell over the tough, this was an impossibility.

The yell alarmed the rest of the gang, and in hot haste they ran to the assistance of their comrade.

The Lightweight carried his revolver in his hand, and when the rough grappled with him he dealt him a blow over the head with it that laid him out in a twinkling.

Released from his grasp Hugh sprang to his feet, but the time occupied by the encounter, brief as it was, had allowed the others to come up, and they were so close to him that the Lightweight felt that it would not be possible to elude them by flight, unacquainted as he was, too, with the ground, which was rough and uneven, full of stumbling-blocks for unaccustomed feet.

So Hugh resolved to stand his ground and fight to the bitter end.

On came the roughs, springing up from behind the rocks in all directions like so many phantoms.

With hoarse cries of rage they filled the air.

Daddy Blazes was in the advance, and in his hand he brandished a revolver.

"Kill him, boys," he cried.

"Kill the spy as a warning to others to keep out of here."

And then the gang took up the cry:

"Kill him—kill him—kill the spy!"

Our hero understood that this was "business," to use the cant saying.

His life was sought, and the angry roughs would not be content with any lesser offering.

He was facing as merciless and bloodthirsty foes as ever a man confronted in this world, and being well aware of the fact he did not stop to parley with them.

It was his life or theirs, and in this emergency he did not hesitate to use prompt action.

He leveled his revolver at the foremost man and fired.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN UNEXPECTED DISCLOSURE.

THE report of the revolver was followed by a yell of agony and Daddy Blazes, who had been leading the gang on and had been unlucky enough to stop the ball, fell forward on his face.

The attackers paused, dismayed by the fall of their leader, and three or four of them who had

their revolvers ready discharged them at the fugitive.

The Lightweight however escaped unhurt, for the ruffians were in too much of a hurry to take careful aim, and he immediately returned the fire.

Another man went down moaning in pain.

This man too one of the ringleaders of the band. The roughs began to waver, and then all of a sudden a cry went up from those in the rear that the police were coming, and immediately all of the scoundrels took to flight, running for dear life, none of them sorry to be spared the necessity of again facing the death-dealing weapon of the spy whom they designed to kill.

The cry that went up was true; the police were at hand.

And it was to the girl that their timely arrival upon the scene of battle could be credited.

In her endeavor to escape she had chanced upon the police force, and she had warned them that murder was doing.

The police force was a strong one, commanded by the captain in charge of the district, and with him was Inspector Burke and the merchant, Franklyn Bookingham.

Mr. Bookingham had become alarmed at not hearing from the Lightweight, and visiting the Inspector at Head-quarters had told him that the amateur detective intended to penetrate into the heart of Shantytown in quest of the cracksmen Black Bud, but to the officer this was no secret, for his interview with the young man had revealed the fact to him, but when he learned that Hugh Strong had not been seen since, he began to think there was cause for alarm, and had suggested that it would be a good idea to take a squad of policemen and go in search of the spy, and out of compliment to the merchant, said he in person would take charge of the expedition.

Bookingham also wished to make one of the party, and so it happened that both he and the great man of the Police Department chanced to be on the ground.

The police with their bull's-eye lanterns soon illuminated the scene.

The Lightweight was bleeding from a slight scratch on his cheek where one of the pistol-balls had just grazed the skin, but otherwise he was unhurt.

The second ruffian too, who had fallen, had received a bullet in the shoulder, and though he was groaning and swearing at a fearful rate he was not dangerously wounded.

Daddy Blazes though was hard hit.

The ball had passed through his lungs, and though outwardly the wound did not seem to be particularly bad as very little blood appeared, yet it was plain from the expression on his face and the weakness which he experienced that he was not long for this world.

He still retained his senses though, and recognized both the Captain and the Inspector the moment he saw them; the merchant, standing behind the rest, did not fall under his gaze.

"Aha, Captain—Inspector, I am glad you are here," he gasped.

"I am done for, I'm afraid; that scoundrel there has murdered me, and I want him to hang for it!" and he waved his revolver, which he still clutched in his hand, toward Hugh Strong.

"It seems to me that you were having a sort of free fight here," the Inspector remarked.

"No, no, self-defense, that's all. I drew my pistol in self-defense," he muttered, "but the scoundrel was too quick for me and put a ball into me before I had a chance to defend myself."

"Remember! it is my dying declaration, Inspector, that man shot me, and if there is any justice in New York you'll hang him—oh!" and a sudden spasm of pain cut short his utterance.

The bystanders looked at each other; the near approach of the grim king of terrors had not in the least abated his vindictive disposition.

"Gentlemen, don't pay any attention to the words of this miserable old wretch," Hugh said.

"The truth of the matter is that he and his gang sought to kill me and I was obliged to use my revolver to keep them off, and if it had not been for your timely arrival I, in all probability, would have had a hard time of it, although I had succeeded in disabling the two foremost men of the gang."

"It's a lie—a lie!" gasped the old man.

"He murdered me without any provocation, and he must hang for it!"

"See here, my friend, don't rave about vengeance any more, but turn your thoughts toward preparing for another world, for I am afraid that your time in this one is short," said the Inspector, kindly.

CHAPTER XL.

A WISE SUGGESTION.

DADDY BLAZES looked up defiantly in the face of the Inspector.

"Ah, I s'pose you think you can frighten me, but I can tell you that you can't play any game of that kind on such a man as I am!" he cried in an angry tone of voice. "I know that infernal scoundrel has severely wounded me, but I am worth a dozen dead men yet!"

"Well, maybe you are. I am no doctor and

do not pretend to be a judge in such matters," the Inspector replied.

"But I can tell you that if I was wounded anywhere near as badly as you seem to be, I should skirmish around for a doctor as soon as possible."

"Oh, yes, that is all very well to say, but how can I do anything, hurt as I am?" the old man snarled.

"We will fix up some sort of a litter for you, the Inspector said, and then he called one of his men and gave directions to that effect.

"And why don't you give orders to take that young scoundrel who shot me into custody?" Daddy Blazes cried.

"Don't you worry your head about that," the officer replied, curtly.

"He shot me!" the old man fairly shrieked.

"And if I die he ought to be hanged!"

"I know my business and you can depend upon my attending to it," the Inspector declared.

"Ah, that is just the way with the world!" Daddy Blazes exclaimed.

"Give a dog a bad name and hang him. Your infernal police have hounded me for years, and now that I have been assaulted and dangerously wounded, you are not willing to arrest the man who assailed me."

"This wretched old villain is not telling the truth, sir," the Lightweight Detective asserted, addressing the Inspector.

"It is true that he was wounded by a bullet from my revolver," the young man continued. "But at the time he received the hurt he was leading on a gang of ruffians who plainly intended to kill me in cold blood if they possibly could."

"It is a lie—a lie!" Daddy Blazes shrieked.

"It is the truth and you know it, old man!" the Lightweight Detective replied, with stern accent.

By this time the policemen had found a shutter which would answer for a litter to convey the wounded man and they approached with the article.

"Put him on it," commanded the Inspector.

"Take him to the station and get a doctor as soon as you can."

"Ain't you going to arrest my murderer?" the old man cried.

"Don't you worry your head about that!" the police official retorted. "Just you attend to your own business and leave me to attend to mine."

"It is an outrage! The idea that a man can be shot down in cold blood, and then the police refuse to arrest the murderer!"

"Ah, will you save your breath, you miserable old wretch?" the Inspector cried, provoked into a rage by the words of Daddy Blazes.

"If you had your just deserts you would have been hung a dozen years ago," the official continued.

"You cannot fool me, you know, and you must try a game of this kind on some man who doesn't know you."

"I am a good, law-abiding citizen, and I never wronged anybody!" the old man declared.

"Bosh!" I know better than that!" the Inspector rejoined. "You have been a crook for ten years to my certain knowledge, and you ought to have been filled with lead long ago."

The official's anger was roused and so he spoke plainly.

"It isn't of any use for you to attempt to stuff me with any of your yarns about being a law-abiding citizen, for I know better."

"You have been so mighty cunning that the detectives have never been able to get you fairly dead to rights, but all of us men in the police department know just what kind of an old rascal you are."

"Many an unfortunate policeman has been waylaid and assaulted by your gang amid these rocks, and although once in a while one of your scamps is run in, yet in the majority of cases they get off scot free, and I don't mind telling you, frankly, that I don't believe there is a man on the force who knows anything about you but will be glad when they hear you have been laid out."

"You can't prove anything against me," the old man fairly howled.

"Oh, yes, I know how cunning you are, and just how well you manage things so that the law can't get a hold on you, but you are a precious old rascal for all of that."

"For the last time I ask you if you are not going to arrest this villain who shot me?" Daddy Blazes demanded.

By this time the policemen had got him on the shutter and were ready to depart.

"Go to the deuce, you miserable old scoundrel!" cried the Inspector, in a rage.

"I will make charges against you for this!" the old man yelled, as he was borne away.

"Ah, save your breath to cool yer soup," cried one of the policemen in charge of the litter, in deep disgust.

The little procession disappeared in the darkness, and then the Lightweight Detective said to the Inspector:

"I am quite ready to surrender myself to meet this charge, if you consider it advisable."

"Oh, no," replied the official, immediately.

"I do not take the least stock in anything that

old scoundrel says. I know the man thoroughly, and a bigger rascal never troubled the police of this city."

"From what little I know of the man, I think that is certainly the truth," the Lightweight remarked.

"I know it to be a fact!" the Inspector cried, in the most decided manner.

"Why, my dear sir, I would be loth to hang a yellow dog on the oath of such a scoundrel as Daddy Blazes!"

"I am not going to run away, of course, and can be easily found if I am wanted," the young man observed.

"As far as that goes, I shall be glad to vouch for this gentleman," said the old merchant, joining in the conversation at this point.

"I am willing to go security that he will appear to answer any charge this wretched old man may see fit to bring against him."

"Oh, that is all right!" the Inspector declared.

"There isn't any necessity for anybody becoming security for him in a case of this kind."

"I presume that Daddy Blazes will do his best to make trouble."

"He got the worst of the fight, and it is only natural that he should banker after revenge, but when he comes to talk about this gentleman making an unprovoked attack on him, I fancy that it will be a hard job for him to get over the testimony of myself and men," the official said.

"We can swear that when we arrived on the ground we found Daddy Blazes and his gang surrounding this gentleman, and doing their best to lay him out."

"And it is not often, you know, that a single man goes in to clean out a gang of a dozen."

"No, I fancy not," observed the Lightweight, laughing. "Not even if he happens to be a champion prize-fighter."

"He will be pretty sure to make the charge, in my opinion. Little doubt that he will, not only because he is anxious to get square with you on account of your getting the best of the fight, but because it will improve his own position to pretend that he was the assaulted man and not the aggressor."

"That is undoubtedly true," the merchant remarked. "Luckily, though, our evidence will upset any story of that kind."

"Oh, he will not make anything, but you can depend upon the miserable old beggar doing his best to cause trouble," the officer remarked.

"Ah, yes, but he will only have his labor for his pains," the merchant asserted, confidently.

"How was it that you happened to come in contact with the old man?" the Inspector asked.

"I was doing a little bit of detective work," the Lightweight explained.

"I was informed that the king cracksmen, Black Bud, as he is called, had taken refuge here amid the rocks, and I was trying to hunt him down."

"Ah, yes, I remember you now! Well, how did you succeed—did you get any clew to him?" the officer asked, becoming immediately interested.

"No, although I managed to get old Daddy Blazes in a tight place, and put the screws to him as well as I was able, yet he persisted in saying that he knew nothing about Black Bud."

"He admitted that he had taken refuge among the rocks, but said the pursuit of him had been so hot that the man became alarmed and judged that it would be wise for him to get out of New York."

"Well, it may be the truth, but I doubt it!" the Inspector declared.

"Such rascals as this Black Bud hate to leave the city, and they will not do it until it comes to the last extremity."

"It may be true that the hot pursuit alarmed him so that he judged it would be wise for him to get out of Daddy Blazes' territory, but the chances are big that he is hiding somewhere in New York."

"I shall try my luck again," the Lightweight answered. "Since I have got into the thing I will do my best to see it through."

"That is the proper kind of spirit!" the Inspector declared. "And if you need any assistance in my line I shall be pleased to give it."

The young man thanked the official for his kindly offer, and then the policemen departed.

"You arrived with the officers just in the nick of time," the Lightweight observed to the girl. "A few minutes more and the ruffians might have succeeded in overpowering me. I shall remember the service and seek an early opportunity to repay it."

"Oh, no," replied the girl, blushing slightly at the ardent words. "I was in your debt, and if I was able to do you a service I only paid what was due."

The old merchant had been regarding the girl intently, a puzzled look upon his face.

"It is strange how familiar your features seem to be to me," he remarked abruptly. "And yet I cannot recall the circumstances of ever meeting you before."

"I do not think we ever met," the girl replied.

"How comes it then that your face is so

strangely familiar!" Buckingham asked, evidently deeply interested.

"Indeed, sir, I cannot explain that," she answered.

"It is very odd indeed," Buckingham declared, shaking his head gravely. "What is your name?"

"Sally McGinnis."

The old merchant shook his head.

"The name is not a familiar one," he remarked.

"And I am greatly puzzled to account for my impression that you are not a stranger to me, when all the circumstances seemed to say that you are."

"Yes, if I have ever met you I would have been sure to remember it for I have so few acquaintances that I would not be apt to forget any of them," the girl remarked.

"Do your parents reside in the city?" the old gentleman asked.

"I really cannot say, sir. There is a mystery in regard to my birth and I never knew who my parents were."

"Dear me, dear me!" Buckingham exclaimed, greatly interested. "This is very strange indeed; and where do you live now?"

"I haven't any home at present," the girl replied, slowly, and with a troubled expression on her face.

"Owing to an unfortunate combination of circumstances I have been obliged to leave the roof which has sheltered me, and at present am utterly at a loss to know where to go."

"Very strange indeed!" the old merchant declared.

"It is evident that you are truly unfortunate, and your condition excites my sympathy. Will you accept the shelter of my house?"

"I am an old, childless man. I had a daughter once, and if she had been spared to me she would be just about your age now."

"I will gladly accept your kind offer if you feel sure I will not be in your way," the girl remarked with grateful tears in her bright eyes.

"Oh, no, I am a wealthy man with a large establishment, and am in the habit of entertaining many guests, so that you need not feel like an intruder if you come."

"Very well; then I will gladly take advantage of your offer and will do all in my power to requite your kindness," the girl responded.

"And I should be pleased to have you come also, Mr. Strong," the merchant observed, turning to the Lightweight.

"Make my house your head-quarters," Buckingham continued. "I think we can arrange it so that you can come and go without attracting observation. I have become deeply interested in this affair and am willing to spend a large sum of money to aid you in your endeavor to bring this Black Bud to justice."

"I take it as a good omen that this old scoundrel has been captured," he added. "And I should not be surprised if you finally succeeded in placing the other rascals in the hands of the law."

"You can depend upon my doing all in my power to accomplish that result," the Lightweight replied.

"I am aware, though, that the odds are greatly against my being able to do anything, for by this time I am well known to the inhabitants of Shantytown, and it would be useless for me to go there without assuming a disguise."

"I think I can aid you!" the girl exclaimed abruptly.

The three had been walking toward the point where the merchant's carriage was in waiting during this conversation, and were now within sight of the vehicle.

The gentlemen looked at the speaker in astonishment.

"I presume you are surprised," she continued, a blush mantling her cheeks. "But I feel sure that I will be able to give you a suggestion which will be of service."

"I shall be glad to receive it, of course," the Lightweight remarked.

"Do you remember the night when you came to the tenement-house where I used to live?" Sally asked.

"Oh, yes; it was then that I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance, and it is not likely that I would forget anything of so agreeable a nature," the young man declared, with a gallant bow.

Again the color rose in the girl's cheeks, and she appeared embarrassed for a few moments, but she speedily recovered her composure and said:

"You are inclined to flatter me, I think, and as I have not been used to anything of the kind, I hardly know what to make of it. But I think I can give you some information which may be of service."

"I shall be glad enough to receive it," the Lightweight declared. "For although I am determined to do all in my power to bring this Black Bud to justice, yet I am at present entirely in the dark as to the best way to proceed."

"I think I can give you a clue," the girl declared.

"Do you remember the boy Corny?"

"Oh, yes, a smart little fellow, a true son of the streets, and wise beyond his years."

"You will find him by going to the tenement-house about nine o'clock at night, for that is the hour when he usually comes home, and he will be sure to remember you, for your exploits on that night, when we became acquainted, filled him with admiration; but he hated the Irishman, and your victory over him gave Corny great delight."

"Yes, a sharp lad like Corny is not apt to forget a man like myself," the Lightweight observed.

"He will be sure to remember you, and although he is extremely suspicious by nature, yet I feel sure he will not fear to trust you if you frankly tell him that you need his aid."

"Yes, but I do not exactly understand," the young man observed. "How can the boy be of service to me?"

"Because I think he is acquainted with the man you seek to capture. This Black Bud's right name is John Buddock, is it not?" the girl asked.

"Yes, so he is called," the Lightweight answered.

"I am sure that I have heard Corny speak of the man, and he will be apt to know where he can be found, and even if he does not know, if you enlist his services, it is very probable that he will be able to find out."

"I think the idea is a capital one!" the old merchant declared.

"A boy of this kind would be able to penetrate into all sorts of low haunts without attracting suspicion, and if you can induce him to aid you, there is no doubt in my mind that he would prove to be a most valuable ally."

The Lightweight was favorably impressed by the suggestion, and said as much, at the same time expressing his thanks to the girl for the happy thought.

Again Sally flushed crimson and became confused.

The old merchant came to her aid.

"You must not allow yourself to become embarrassed," he remarked.

"The idea is a most excellent one and I do not wonder that this young gentleman is impressed by it; and as I too take a great interest in this case, being very anxious that this notorious rascal should be captured, I also feel under obligation to you for the wise suggestion. But there, I will not say anything more as I see that I am troubling you, even though I am not saying anything but the truth."

"Get into the carriage and we will be off. To-night this young gentleman can rest in peace, for I have no doubt that he is fatigued after his exertions, and then to-morrow he can resume his search."

The three entered the carriage and were driven to the palatial home of the old New Yorker, and when the Lightweight and the girl were within the mansion, Mr. Buckingham did all in his power to make them comfortable.

CHAPTER XLI.

DADDY BLAZES AND THE INSPECTOR.

THE King of the Rocks was conveyed to the police station, and as one of the surgeons attached to the department happened to be there an immediate examination was made of the old man's injury.

The doctor was a young man who knew very little about gunshot wounds, as he had no practical experience in that line, and after a hasty inspection of the hurt he came to the conclusion that Daddy Blazes was not badly wounded.

"It is an ugly scratch, but that is about all," he announced. "It will trouble him for a while but I do not think there is any danger of it amounting to anything."

"I judge that the ball has lodged in the muscles of the back and it can be easily extracted, although I am not able at present to locate the precise spot where the lead lies."

The police Inspector was a veteran, and long experience had made him an extra good judge of mankind, and so he was quick to jump to a conclusion in regard to the doctor.

"Summon an ambulance and I will take the man to Head-quarters," he said.

He doubted the truth of the young man's statement, for it was his belief that Daddy Blazes was hard hit.

Of course he was not a doctor, but as he was a veteran soldier, having served all through the War of the Rebellion, he had seen many a man suffering from a bullet wound, and if the old rascal was not badly hurt, then his judgment was at fault.

"Yes, and you can summon Doctor Jamison to take a look at him," the surgeon remarked. "He makes a specialty of cases of this kind, for he is an old army surgeon, and went all through the war."

The doctor of whom he spoke was the one attached to Police Head-quarters, and the Inspector had him in his mind when he determined to carry the prisoner to the Mulberry street mansion.

In due time the ambulance came, and the wounded man, in company with the Inspector, took passage in it.

The party arrived at Police Head-quarters without any incident worthy of note occurring on the way.

As it happened, the police surgeon was in the building, and so the patient received immediate attention.

The ball was sought for and found, not in the muscles of the back, as the first doctor had anticipated, but in the side; it had struck a rib and passed around it.

"Will it be safe to carry him to the Tombs, or ought he to go to a hospital?" the Inspector asked.

"Well, I think he is all right," the medical man responded, slowly.

"Still, it is one of those cases in which it is hard work to give a decided opinion."

"Apparently the wound is not a serious one, although he has received a great shock, yet I think he will pull through all right, and unless the ball has done more damage than appears on the surface, there isn't any need of sending him to a hospital."

This conversation took place in the presence of the old ruffian, and at this point he flared up indignantly.

"What do you mean by talking about taking me to the Tombs, Inspector?" he demanded.

"Because that is just what I am going to do," the police chief responded, bluntly.

"Am I under arrest, then?" Daddy Blazes exclaimed, angrily.

"Of course! Do you think I am taking all this trouble just for fun?"

"But this is monstrous!" the old man declared in a great rage.

"Now, see here, you might just as well save your breath," the Inspector counseled. "For talking will not do you any good."

"You arrest me—the man who was shot, and yet allow the fellow who did the shooting to go free!"

"Because you are the man who made the trouble," the police chief replied.

"You cannot prove that!" Daddy Blazes retorted, showing his teeth and snarling like an angry dog.

"Oh, yes, I can, and you make a big mistake if you think I can't!"

"That scoundrel tried to murder me while I was quietly going about my business!"

"No, no, nothing of the kind, and you mustn't think you can deceive me with any yarn of that sort for I know better."

"You and your gang got the idea into your heads that the young fellow was a spy, and so you went in to lay him out. You see I know all about it."

"Nothing of the kind!" Daddy Blazes declared, endeavoring to assume a look of injured innocence.

"I am a peaceful, law-abiding man, and I never attempt to injure anybody!"

"That is a good story for you to tell, but it will not go down with me, you understand, for I know better! You can't fool me for a cent, and you are only wasting your breath in trying on any game of the kind."

"Oh, yes, I understand that you and your police have a prejudice against me, and are not willing to give me any show!" the old man declared with bitter accent.

"Well, as far as that goes I don't think that you can blame any one but yourself," the Inspector replied, sternly.

"If you choose to consort with thieves and rascals of all degrees—to make your shanty a head-quarters—a regular house of call, in fact, for crooks, you must not blame the police for having a bad opinion of you."

"Upon what charge am I held?" Daddy Blazes asked, abruptly.

"Assault, with intent to kill."

"It is ridiculous! I am the man who was assaulted!" the old fellow declared.

"That will do for you to tell, but it is my belief that you will have hard work to make your story good; and I can tell you, right now, that you are caught dead to rights this time, and it will not be an easy matter for you to get out of it."

"You and your gang assaulted that young man, and he shot you in self-defense."

"You can't prove it!" Daddy Blazes declared, sulkily.

"Oh, yes, I can," the Inspector replied, in the most confident way.

"As I came up I heard you yelling at the top of your voice to kill the spy, as a warning to others to keep out of Shantytown."

"Those were your very words, and you can bet high that when you come to be tried, the evidence of myself and men in regard to this circumstance will be mighty apt to make mince-meat out of your declaration that you were the assaulted party."

"Oh, yes, I understand all about it," the old man exclaimed, angrily.

"You cops have got it in for me, and now that you have got a chance, you are going to put it to me, as well as you know how."

"Ah, come off!" cried the Inspector, in derision.

"What is the use of your wasting your breath in trying to fool me?"

"You have had a mighty long innings, old

man, and have no cause to complain because you are tripped up at last.

"Mighty few men have there ever been in New York who have played as bold a game as you have for the last ten years and escaped getting caught, and now that your turn has come to face the music, you ought not to complain, but stand up and take your medicine like a man, for you are sure to get it this time.

"It is a straight tip I am giving you, old man, and don't you forget it."

Daddy Blazes was so disgusted by this plain talk that he disdained to continue the conversation, and during the ride to the city prison no word came from his lips.

At the Tombs, he was consigned to the care of the warden, and the Inspector departed, chuckling to himself in great glee.

He was highly delighted in having succeeded in trapping the King of the Rocks, and was satisfied that the proof against Daddy Blazes was so strong that the old fellow stood no chance of escaping.

"I am very much obliged to that young sailor chap," he murmured. "For he has succeeded in doing what none of my detectives were smart enough to accomplish.

"But it is the old story of the new broom sweeping clean, I suppose.

"He is a smart fellow, anyway, and if he should manage to run Black Bud down, all the boys will have to admit that he is a hummer!"

It will be seen that the police chief was in rare good humor.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN PRISON.

EARLY in the morning Daddy Blazes sent for Lawyer Jefferson Wimple.

It was the first time that the King of the Rocks had ever consulted Wimple, but as he had quarreled with the criminal lawyer whom he usually employed he was forced to seek other counsel.

The lawyer soon made his appearance, looking decidedly the worse for wear, as his face was disfigured by court-plaster which had been applied to cover the bruises he had received on the occasion of his visit to Shantytown.

Daddy Blazes surveyed him with astonishment.

"My goodness! counselor, you look as if you had been in trouble!" the old man exclaimed.

"I was fool enough to pay a visit to a woman up in your territory," the lawyer explained, with a grimace.

I wanted a little information and took a policeman along thinking I could frighten it out of her."

"Oho! were you the man that had the trouble with Widow O'Flannigan?"

"Yes, I am the one," Wimple replied.

"I heard all about the affair. You and the officer were pretty roughly handled!"

"It was a mercy that we escaped with our lives."

"Well, well! I hadn't any idea that it was any one I knew," Daddy Blazes remarked, in a reflective way.

"And, really, Wimple, I am amazed that a man of your experience should attempt to do any such foolish thing."

"I had an idea that if I had the officer along everything would be all right," the lawyer explained.

"It is plain that you were not posted in regard to the people who live in Shantytown."

"I must admit that I know a good deal more about them now than I did," Wimple observed, tartly.

"A single officer is of no use up in that region, and it is a wonder that either one of you got off as well as you did."

"Yes, I agree with you in regard to that," the other declared.

"And at one time things looked so squally that I would not have cared to make a bet that the pair of us would get out alive."

"There is a tough gang up there in Shantytown, and no mistake!" Daddy Blazes exclaimed, with a weighty shake of the head.

"It is their boast, you know, that it takes a big force to make a capture among the rocks."

"No two or three officers can come up there and pull their man out, you understand?"

"Oh, yes, I know all about it now. I have had a practical illustration of what the Shantytown folks can do when they get their mad up, and you can bet your sweet life I wouldn't try to come any game up there again, unless I had a dozen officers at my back!"

"Well, you wouldn't be wise to try it."

"I have always heard that the Shantytown people were a tough gang, but in order to understand just how tough they are, a man must go in amongst them, just as I did."

"Oh, yes, that is true enough, but it was a very foolish move on your part," Daddy Blazes declared.

"You are not telling me any news when you say that," the lawyer responded.

"But when I went I did not expect there would be any trouble," he continued.

"I wanted a little information out of Mrs. O'Flannigan, and as I didn't know much about the woman, I fancied I could bulldoze it out of her."

"Oh, no! I could have told you a deal better than that, if you had only taken the trouble to consult me. She is an ugly old dame, particularly when she is in liquor, and that is usually the greater part of the time."

"Yes, I made a big mistake about the woman; there is no two ways in regard to that. I made a regular donkey of myself, but you see, I have been so used to bulldozing that kind of people, and doing about as I liked with them, that I never imagined I would have any trouble."

"There is a deal of difference, you see, between talking to the woman in your own office and having a conversation with her at her home amid the rocks of Shantytown," Daddy Blazes remarked, shrewdly.

"You can bet your life that I will never make such a mistake again!" Wimple declared, emphatically.

"The way for you to have worked the trick would have been for you to come to me," the old man suggested.

"I could have arranged matters so that if you had not been able to do anything with the widow, she would not have raised a row, as she did."

"The policeman did you no good, you know," Daddy Blazes continued.

"His presence only excited the boys, for it is just nuts to them to get a crack at a cop when they can succeed in getting one alone up in the rocks."

"Oh, yes; I understand now, when it is too late, just how the game ought to have been worked!" Wimple exclaimed, impatiently.

"That is a peculiarity of this world," he added. "A man always finds out a thing of that kind when it is too late for the information to be of any benefit to him."

"If you had come to me you wouldn't have had any trouble, although you might not have succeeded in getting at what you sought."

"The fact is I never thought of you," the lawyer replied.

"I knew, of course, that you lived somewhere up in that region, but when I started to see the woman I did not have you in my mind at all."

"I would have been glad to have done anything for you that I could, for I always make a point of keeping on the right side of men like yourself."

"That isn't a bad idea," the lawyer remarked with an approving nod.

"But now, to come down to business, this is a rather hard hole you are in."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, to speak frankly, I do, that is if the accounts given in the morning newspapers are at all correct. Have you seen any of them?"

"I have, and the cursed reporters make out a strong case against me, of course!" Daddy Blazes exclaimed, angrily.

"These blamed newspaper men are always anxious to stand in with the police, you know."

"Oh, yes, that goes without saying, and when they get a chance to write up a man like yourself they always go in to make a big thing out of it."

"The public like to read spicy articles, you comprehend, and that is the way the newspaper fellows make their bread and butter."

"What do you think of my chances?"

"Well, it seems to me the police have got you dead to rights, as far as the assault goes; you were taken red-handed, and it will not do you much good to set up the defense that you were not the attacking party, for the evidence that you were is too strong for you to disprove."

"There is only one point in your favor as far as I can see, and that is, you got the worst of the fight."

"Yes, and I am pretty badly wounded too," the old man asserted.

"Really I ought to be in the hospital, but the doctor does not believe I am in any danger and so he sent me here, but I know he is wrong, and sometimes I am a little doubtful as to whether I will get over this thing or not."

"Oh, I don't think there is any danger of a fatal result," Wimple remarked, carelessly.

The doctor evidently believes you will pull through all right or else he wouldn't have sent you here."

"Doctors don't know everything!" Daddy Blazes ejaculated, crossly.

"Besides I am much worse to-day than I was last night. I told the warden this morning that I needed the doctor as soon as I can get him, but I could see from the way he acted that he thought I wasn't near as sick as I tried to make out."

"The sick act has been played on these prison fellows so often that they are always suspicious when a man says he isn't well and calls for a doctor."

"Well, if a man has got any sense he ought to be able to see that I am not lying," Daddy Blazes declared.

"You do look like a sick man, and there is no two ways about it," the lawyer replied.

"And that fact will help you too on your trial," Wimple continued.

"There is one strong point in your favor, and that is, although the police may be able to prove conclusively that you were the man who began the trouble, yet it is a fact that the other fellow

escaped unharmed, while you were badly wounded, and when you come to trial that circumstance will surely have great weight."

"Yes, I should imagine so," the old man observed, thoughtfully.

"You can get plenty of witnesses, I suppose, to swear that the police are mistaken in stating that you were leading the gang on to assault the young man, and that you did not cry out to kill the spy as they allege?" the lawyer asked with a crafty smile.

"Oh, yes, twenty!"

"Three or four good ones will be enough. Pick them out and send them to my office so I can have a talk with them, as they must all tell the same story."

Daddy Blazes said he would do so and after a few more unimportant words the lawyer departed.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MAKING A BARGAIN.

ON the evening of the same day that the interview took place between the King of the Rocks and the wily criminal lawyer, in the Tombs, the Lightweight made his way to the old tenement-house where he had first encountered the girl Sally.

The clocks were just striking nine as the young man reached the door of the house.

"I am prompt to the minute," he murmured. "And now I wonder how long I will have to wait for the boy?"

Hardly had the words escaped from his lips when the boy made his appearance, coming down the street.

He recognized the young man as soon as he got his eyes on him.

"Oh, crickey!" he exclaimed, "I wish I may die if I ain't mighty glad to see you!"

"I am pleased to hear that."

"You kin bet yer sweet life that I am giving you the straight tip on that!" the boy declared.

"I have often thought of yer noble nibs since the night when you cleaned out that big-mouthed, red-headed Paddy whack!"

"That was a bully fight!" he continued, in glee.

"I have seen a good many scraps—some of 'em wid reg'lar professional pugs a-putting up their dukes, the coves w'ot go in to meet all comers in the Bowery the-a-ters onc't in a while—but I never see'd anything better dan der way you handled der big McGinniss."

"Why, he wasn't in it from de fust to der last!"

"He was rather cutclassed," the Lightweight observed, with a smile.

"Oh, you kin bet yer bottom dollar on dat, and you will call the turn every time!" Corny exclaimed.

Then the boy noticed the wound on the Lightweight's cheek, now covered with court-plaster.

"W'at is der matter, cully? Been gitting scratched on der cheek—anodder scrap, hey?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes, I got into a little trouble up in Shantytown last night."

"Yer don't mean it!" cried Corny, abruptly.

"You don't mean to say dat you was der cove w'ot put ther chunk of lead into old Daddy Blazes, and did him up in der furst round, hey?"

"Yes, I was the man."

"I read all about der scrap in der noosepaper dis morning, and I sed to myself, sed I, der man dat went up to Shantytown, and checked Old Daddy Blazes, right in amongst his own rocks must have had a heap of sand, and I reckon at der time dat it must be some cove of your style."

"It was rather a foolhardy expedition," the Lightweight remarked, thoughtfully. "And if I had known as much about Daddy Blazes in the beginning as I know now I do not think I would have risked it."

"W'ot was yer arter, sport, anyway?" the boy asked, inquisitively.

"I was in search of a man named John Bud-dock—Black Bud his pals call him," the Lightweight responded, dropping his voice to a low tone, and casting a cautious glance around before he spoke so as to be sure there wasn't any listeners in the neighborhood.

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, that is what I was after."

"Say, sport, are you on the detective lay?" the boy asked, abruptly.

"I am doing a little in that line, but you mustn't give it away."

"Give nothin' away!" cried Corny, with a sniff of contempt. "You kin bet yer life that I ain't dat kind of a hairpin!"

"I wasn't born yesterday!" he continued, shaking his head in a very knowing way. "And you kin bet high on dat, too!"

"I did not succeed in striking my man, although I managed to stir up Daddy Blazes and his gang; in fact ran myself into a regular hornets' nest."

"Well, you pulled out all right, and what is the odds as long as ye'r happy?" the boy exclaimed, with the air of a philosopher.

"Oh, I don't regret going, although I did not succeed in accomplishing anything," the Lightweight remarked.

"I was anxious to put the bracelets on Black Bud, and so I risked a visit to Shantyville."

"It was a mighty bold move, you bet yer life!" Corny exclaimed.

"I know jest w'ot kind of a crowd bang out up dere among the rocks," the boy continued.

"And there are mighty few cops who would be willing to go in dere alone for to pull a man out."

"I did not succeed in my mission, but I am not inclined to give it up as a bad job yet."

"That's right! The cove w'ot sticks to it is bound to come out a winner in der end!" the boy declared with the air of a sage.

"I was talking with Miss McGinnis about the matter, and she recommended me to come to you, for she said she thought you would be able to put me on the track of Black Bud."

The boy cast a careful glance around, then he shook his head in a knowing way, and, dropping his voice almost to a whisper, said:

"Are you giving it to me on the dead straight, cully?"

"Oh, yes, you can depend on that."

"And did Sally say dat she thought I could put you up to the time of day?"

"Yes, that was her opinion."

"Dat girl is a hummer, and w'ot she don't know ain't worth knowing!" Corny declared in accents of admiration.

"And she thought I could put you on to der game, hey?"

"So she said, and it was her idea that if I told you she sent me you would do all in your power to aid me."

"And she is right, for a hundred dollars!" the boy declared.

"I am the kind of a cove that would go through fire and wacer for dat gal, and, Sport, I will do my level best for you in dis racket!"

"Do you think you can put me on the track of Black Bud?"

"I can't do it right to one't, you know," Corny responded.

"Black Bud is keeping mighty shady just about this time, you understand, for the cops are hot arter him, and he is no fool for to go a-walking 'round New York, when he is wanted by the perlice."

"Yes, I comprehend that," the Lightweight replied. "I know the man is doing his best to keep out of the way of the police, but it was Miss Sally's thought that as you were acquainted with the man and his haunts you would be able to get on his track."

"You see, the idea is, no one would suspect that you were trying to run the man down, and so you would be able to gain information when it would not be possible for a man like myself, or a regular detective, to do anything."

"There is a heap of sense in dat, you bet yer boots!" the boy exclaimed.

"And if you care to try what you can do in this matter it will be money in your pocket."

"And dat is w'ot we are all arter!" exclaimed the boy, with a grin.

"Yes, money makes the mare go!"

"You bet yer sweet life it does!" Corny declared, emphatically.

"No money, no go!" he added, with another grin.

"You will not have to work for nothing," the Lightweight remarked.

"And you will be well paid, even if you do not succeed in getting on the track of the man."

"But, s'pose I do get on his track—and you kin bet yer life dat I will if I start in to do the trick—s'pose I fix things so dat you, or de cops, kin give him de collar how much will I git—ten dollars?"

"A hundred!"

"How much?"

"A hundred, I said."

"Ah, go away wid yer! You are trying to play some roots on me now!" the boy declared, his suspicions excited.

"Oh, no. I am speaking the truth. It will be a hundred dollars in your pocket if you succeed in gaining such information in regard to John Buddock as will lead to his capture."

"A hundred dollars!" exclaimed Corny, his eyes sparkling with delight. "Well, now, sport, I tell you w'ot it is, I never expected to ketch that many 'cases' in one grab, and you kin bet high dat I will do my level best to collar them."

"I shall be very glad to pay the money if you succeed in doing the work."

"You are der cove w'ot will pay der money, den?" the boy asked.

"Yes, you will deal with me."

"And not wid der cops?"

"No."

"I'm glad of dat, 'cause I don't like dem cops for a cent, but if you are de man w'ot is running der machine, you kin bet yer life dat we will git on all right togedder."

"I hope so."

"Ah, you kin put all yer ducats on it!" Corny declared.

"Sally was right then when she surmised that you knew a good deal about this Black Bud?"

"Yes, she has got it down fine, and dis is der way of it. Black Bud used to be a pal of Danny Hibbard, who is Sally's brudder; dat is

dey used for to call him her brudder, but dat is all in my eye, yer know, 'cos he ain't no more her brudder dan I am, 'cos Sally is a gal what old dame Hibbard got somewhere, and nobody knows who she belongs to."

"Ah, there is a mystery then about Miss Sally's birth?"

"Yes, but I say, sport, you mustn't let on dat I gave de snap away, 'cos, mebbe, Sally wouldn't like it," the boy remarked, in a very earnest way.

"Oh, that is all right; you can depend upon my discretion."

"Danny is a hard nut!" Corny declared, with a solemn shake of the head.

"You might travel all over New York, from de Harlem River to der Battery, and you wouldn't be able to find a tougher rooster."

"He is in jail most of der time, 'cos he can't let liquor alone, and when a man goes in for to take a trick, he can't do much if he is chuck full of booze."

"No, he is apt to make a bungle of it."

"I know Danny like as if he was my brudder, and as Black Bud was his pal for a while, in course I know all about him, too."

"I see. Well, you certainly ought to be able to get the hundred."

"If Black Bud hasn't cut his lucky, and made tracks from der city, I'll win der hundred, bet yer sweet life on it!" Corny declared, emphatically.

"The search for the man has been so hot that he was driven out of his usual haunts and the detectives traced him to Shantyville," the Lightweight explained.

"It was their idea he took refuge in Daddy Blazes' house, but when the Inspector, at the head of a squad of policemen, made a raid on the old man's shanty, he was not able to find any trace of the crook."

"Dat don't go for to prove dat he wasn't dere!" the boy exclaimed, shrewdly.

"I have been up to old Daddy Blazes' house five or six times wid Danny when he had stuff dat he wanted to git rid of—boodle, you know, dat he won," Corny explained.

"De old man was a fence, and allers bought de swag dat any of de gang lifted."

"Yes, I understood he was a receiver of stolen goods."

"Cert! dat is, if der stuff was so dat he could make anything out of it."

"Well, I heered de blokes dat was crooked talk 'bout old Daddy Blazes a heap of times, and dey said dat he had a lot of hiding-places—holes in der rocks, and sich like, where he stowed de swag away, and dey said dat dese hiding-places was so fixed dat de smartest fly cop couldn't get on to dem."

"Yes, I know of my own knowledge that such hiding-places exist," the Lightweight remarked, and then he related his adventures in Daddy Blazes' den.

The boy listened with the greatest interest.

"And some cove came behind yer, when yer was a-scrapping wid de old man, and laid you out wid a welt on de conk?"

"Yes, that is the way the trick was done; and if I had not been so taken by surprise, I could easily have got the best of the old scoundrel."

"I believe yer, boss!" the boy exclaimed, emphatically.

Arter de way I see'd you wipe up der ground wid dat big Irishman I kin understand that nobody but a slugger like John L. Sullivan has got any business wid you."

"I have been thinking over the matter, and have come to the conclusion it is probable that the man who laid me out was the very fellow I was after."

"Black Bud?"

"Yes."

"Cert! why, boss, it seems to me dat de odds are a hundred to one dat he is de man w'ot did de trick."

"I am inclined to think so. He was concealed in some secret hiding-place and came out just in time to keep me from overpowering the old man."

"Oh, yes, you have got it down fine! Dere ain't no mistake 'bout it!"

"I know of my own knowledge of one secret underground apartment under Daddy Blazes' shanty, and it seems to me it is probable there are others."

"Der crooked blokes allers said dat de old man had a dozen holes where he stowed away de swag."

"That statement may be a little exaggerated, you know," the Lightweight suggested.

"Mebbe it is, but you kin bet yer sweet life dat de old rat has got more than one hole!" the boy declared.

"Yes, I think that very likely; possibly three or four, and in some one of these secret hiding-places Black Bud is now concealed, waiting for the storm to blow over."

"Dat is it! You have hit it!"

"And if the man is there, some of the gang must know it, particularly as Daddy Blazes is now locked up in the Tombs, so that he cannot attend to the fugitive."

"Oh, yes, and it is mighty hard to keep a game of dat sort quiet!" Corny asserted.

"Some of der gang are bound to find it out, and den they whisper it to de odder fellers."

"Yes, a suspicion of the truth is certain to get around, although it may be kept from the ears of the police."

"You kin bet yer sweet life though, dat if I was up in Shantyville, dat I would catch on to de thing!" the boy declared.

"That is just the game that must be played!" the Lightweight remarked.

"You must go to Shantyville, devise some excuse to remain there, and keep your eyes and ears open until you ascertain to a certainty whether Black Bud is concealed there or not."

"I kin give them a ghost story 'bout how I got in trouble wid de cops 'bout liftin' a drunken man's ticker, and how I must lay low till de thing blows over."

"That story will do, and the chances are great that no one will suspect it isn't the truth."

"Ah, I will give it to 'em so fine dat dere won't be one on 'em fly enuff to tumble to the racket!" the boy declared.

Then the Lightweight arranged a means of communication, and Corny departed on his mission.

The boy had not overrated his abilities, for within two hours the detective was in possession of the information that Black Bud was concealed in Daddy Blazes' shanty.

The Lightweight was prompt to act.

Just as the clocks of the metropolis were striking the midnight hour, Hugh Strong, at the head of a strong detachment of police, invaded Shantyville, burst open the door of the old crook's house, and surprised John Buddock in bed.

Although taken completely by surprise the hunted man man offered a stout resistance, but he was quickly overpowered and an hour later was an inmate of the Tombs.

The Lightweight was making a name for himself as a detective.

CHAPTER XLV.

DADDY BLAZES SPEAKS.

BOOKINGHAM, the merchant, sat at the table with his guests, Miss Sally and the Lightweight.

They had just finished breakfast when the Inspector was announced.

"I have taken the liberty of calling upon you, Mr. Bookingham, in regard to Daddy Blazes," the officer said.

"It was my idea from the beginning that the man was mortally wounded, although the doctors did not think so," he continued. "But this morning he has grown so much worse that I was summoned, and now the medical men say that he has not many hours to live."

"He is out of his head at times and raves continually about some 'secret' which he knows concerning you, and as there is a young girl mixed up in it in some way I did not know but what it might be this lady," and he bowed to Sally.

"We will go to him" at once!" the merchant exclaimed.

A half-hour later the four stood by the bedside of the sick man.

He lay with his eyes closed, half-insensible, when the party entered.

"How is he?" the Inspector inquired of Doctor Jamison, who was in attendance.

"Pretty near to death," the doctor replied.

"I should not be surprised to see him pass away at any moment, and then he may hold out for an hour."

Daddy Blazes unclosed his eyes and looked up in Jamison's face.

"Is there any hope for me, doctor?" he gasped.

"No, your wound is a fatal one," the doctor replied.

"No, no, I am not going to die—I am not ready to die yet—I have a deal to do in this world," the old fellow replied, in broken accents.

"Well, if my judgment is good for anything, and I think it is, for I've had a deal of experience in this sort of thing, you haven't got another hour of life left, so if there is anything you want attended to you better make arrangements before it is too late," remarked Inspector Burke, decidedly.

"No, no; I must not die yet. I have a deal to do—my lifelong scheme of vengeance is not yet complete."

"There are more blows to be struck—blows in the future compared to which those in the past will be as nothing."

At this point the police captain chanced to move a little to one side and the old man for the first time caught a view of the face of the merchant.

He stared in astonishment.

"Franklyn Bookingham!" he gasped; "am I so near death that my eyesight plays me false and I see that which is not?"

"You still retain possession of your senses, sir," replied the merchant.

"Franklyn Bookingham is my name."

"And what think you? Do you join in the Inspector's opinion that I am near death?"

"I do, most decidedly," Bookingham replied. "I can see death written on your face, if it was ever written on the face of a human."

"I begin to believe that you are right," Daddy Blazes said, after a pause.

"It seems to me now as if I can feel the cold wings of the dark angel fanning my heated brow."

"Well, let it come! I am not afraid of death, though I crave life to accomplish the task of vengeance which I took upon myself years ago."

"Franklyn Bookingham, you had a cousin once—a cousin Reginald, who became your brother, by adoption. Where is he now?" he asked abruptly, fixing his eyes upon the merchant.

The other, though amazed at the question, replied to it:

"He disappeared about seventeen years ago and no one ever knew what became of him."

"You loved that cousin, did you not?"

"No," replied the merchant, frankly. "We were not like brothers and there was bad blood between us from childhood."

"You are right, and he hated you as he hated no one else in this world."

"All good fortune came to you and none to him."

"You supplanted him in the affection of the father and mother who should have held the scales of justice with an even hand."

"You won the only girl he ever loved, and then he swore to devote his life to vengeance."

"He waited until your baby girl had twined itself tightly around your heart and then he stole the child away."

"It was a fearful crime and even Heaven seemed to frown upon it, for in his flight he took a night-boat up the river intending to carry the child to Canada, from whence it could never be returned to you, but before the boat had been an hour on her way the boiler exploded, the stolen child was killed outright, and the abductor, terribly injured by the explosion, a deformed wretch, was hurled into the river."

"He was rescued, and fate let him live to follow the dark path of crime—to strike blows from the dark at your prosperity, but with all his efforts fortune smiled upon you and you prospered."

"Great heavens!" cried Bookingham wildly excited, "can it be possible that you are—"

"Your cousin, Reginald. It is true, and now in my last hour I hate and curse you, as I have done for nearly all my life. It was I that stole your child and gave her to death beneath the dark waters."

"Not so," exclaimed the maiden stepping forward at this point. "I was that child and was rescued from the water, by whom I know not, but on the shore I wandered away, and was cared for by a woman who found me. I still have the clothes I wore as a child."

A look into the girl's face convinced the merchant that she spoke the truth, for there he could distinctly trace the resemblance to his dead wife, and in another moment she was folded in his arms.

The sight proved too much for the vengeful man, and with a gasp his soul passed away.

And now our tale is told.

To avoid pursuit the girl had called herself by her supposed mother's maiden name when she sought shelter with her uncle, and as a disguise she had placed a red-gold-haired wig over her own dark tresses, when she had gone on her secret quest to the old house, and this is why the Lightweight did not recognize her when he interfered in her behalf although she did him.

By entering the janitor's room on the first floor, and using the speaking-tube which communicated with the front door, she was able to speak to her protector without his being able to discover how the trick was done.

The infant's clothes were recovered from Mrs. O'Flannigan, and these were quickly identified, so there wasn't any doubt that she was the long-lost child.

The merchant pressed a princely sum upon Hugh, but he refused to take it, saying he sought a richer one still. The maiden blushed at the words, and Bookingham realized that he had found his child only to lose her again, but he was wise enough to understand that though he might have a richer son-in-law, it would be hard to find a nobler one than Hugh Strong, the Lightweight.

THE END.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
98 William Street, New York.